



CHURCHILL'S DARKEST HOUR
HOW BRITAIN HIT ROCK BOTTOM IN 1942



HISTORY

MAGAZINE

BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING HISTORY MAGAZINE

April 2022 / [historyextra.com](https://www.historyextra.com)

NAPOLÉON

ENEMY OF
THE FRENCH
REVOLUTION?

Cromwell's radical republic

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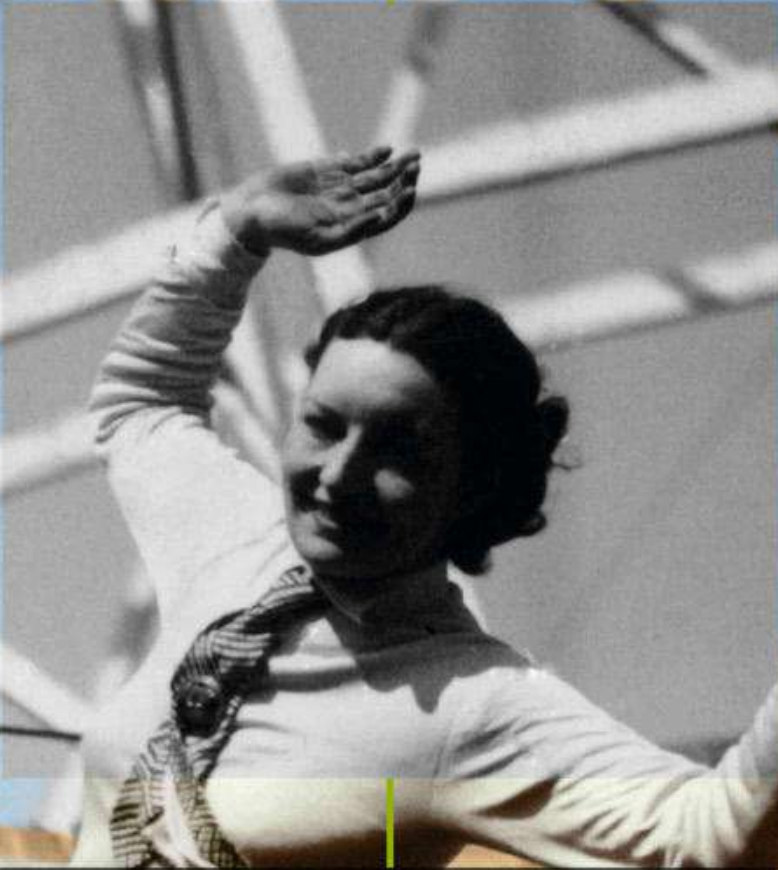
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What fate befell the people of Rapa Nui?

In search of Mary Seacole

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March Record Highlights*

UK, Women's Land Army Index Cards, 1939-1945 - **NEW**

Oklahoma and Indian Territory, U.S., Dawes Census
Cards for Five Civilized Tribes, 1898-1914 - **UPDATE**

Aube, France, Births, Marriages, and Deaths,
1792-1912 - **NEW**

*Record collections subject to change.

“ Shortly before we went to press with this issue came the sobering news of **Russia’s invasion of Ukraine**. This is a moment that historians will be reflecting on for decades to come, and one that is itself informed by the region’s past. On page 10, Keith Lowe explores the **historical background to the current crisis**, from tsarist Russia to the Second World War, and we’ll be covering the backstory in greater depth in our May edition, as well as at *historyextra.com*.

Sticking with the Second World War theme, the opening feature of this month’s magazine takes us back to **Britain in 1942**. While 1940 is often seen as Britain’s (and Churchill’s) darkest hour in the war, Taylor Downing argues that 1942 – a year full of military disasters – was a **far more perilous time for the wartime leader**. Turn to page 20 for that.

Meanwhile, our cover feature examines the rule of one of the most pivotal figures of modern history: **Napoleon Bonaparte**. He often presented himself as the heir to the French Revolution, but how far did the reality match the rhetoric? In her *Think Piece* on page 41, Marisa Linton considers whether the revolutionary changes of the 1790s survived into the Napoleonic era.

Another figure under the microscope this issue is the Jamaican-born healer **Mary Seacole**, who in 2004 was voted the “greatest black Briton”. Historian Helen Rapaport has spent 20 years researching Seacole’s life, and on page 62 she offers a fresh appraisal of a remarkable woman.

Rob Attar

Editor



THREE THINGS I’VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. Tea and theatre

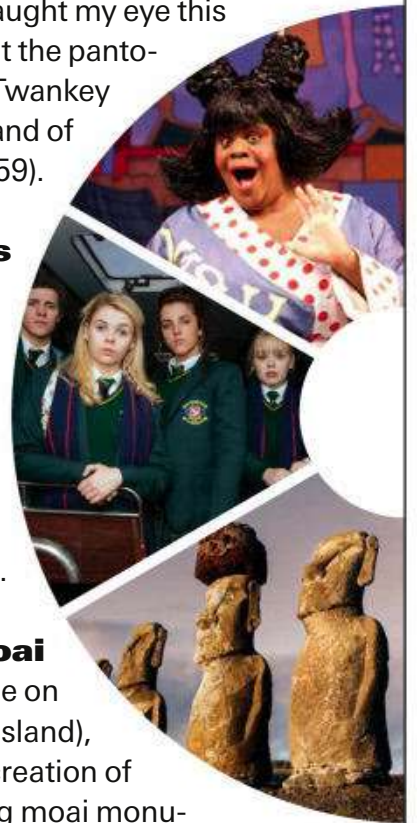
Our Q&A section is always full of fascinating trivia, and one item that caught my eye this month was the fact that the pantomime character Widow Twankey was named after a brand of Chinese tea (page 59).

2. TV history lessons

I was fascinated to learn from our interview with Neil MacGregor that a blackboard used in the sitcom *Derry Girls* has become a highlight of the Ulster Museum’s displays (page 36).

3. Majestic moai

In Cat Jarman’s piece on Rapa Nui (Easter Island), she explores the creation of the stunning moai monuments, revealing that some weighed up to 74 metric tons (page 55).



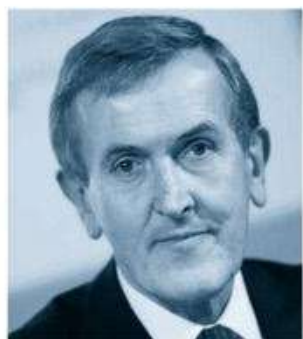
THIS ISSUE’S CONTRIBUTORS



Marisa Linton

“The French Revolution was founded on hopes that a better world could be created, based on liberty and equality, but it descended into political instability, tragedy and war. The result was Napoleon’s militarist dictatorship.”

Marisa explores how Napoleon undermined the French Revolution on page 41



Neil MacGregor

“In big cities all around the UK, museums are in every way part of the public realm. Indeed, the civic role played by museums is one of the great traditions of our country.”

Neil considers the changing role of museums in modern Britain on page 35



Anna Keay

“In my new book I’ve chosen to explore the Commonwealth period in the British Isles through a series of contemporaries, including a maverick newspaper editor, a pioneering scientist and a pistol-wielding countess.”

Anna views the Interregnum from the perspective of eyewitnesses on page 28



Christopher de Bellaigue

“The early years of Suleyman’s time as sultan were marked by extraordinary cosmopolitanism in the Ottoman empire – there was the rise of people from literally nowhere to becoming incredibly powerful.”

Christopher profiles the Ottoman sultan Suleyman the Magnificent on page 76

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EVERY MONTH

This month in history

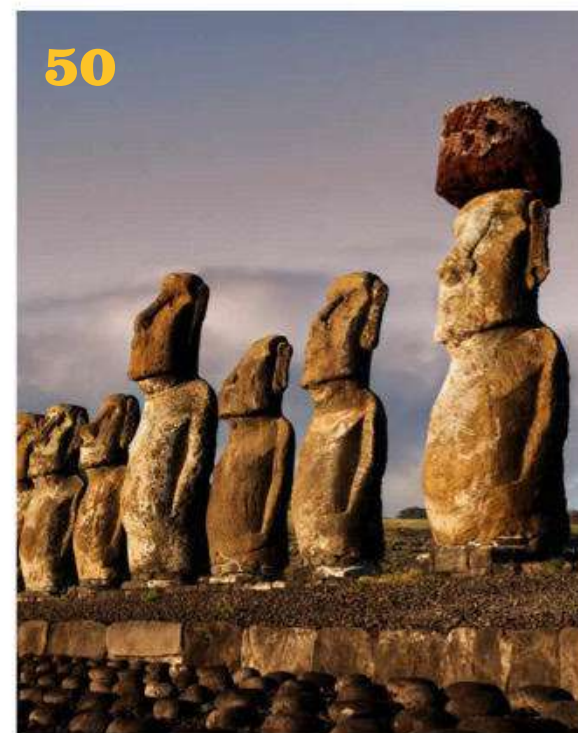
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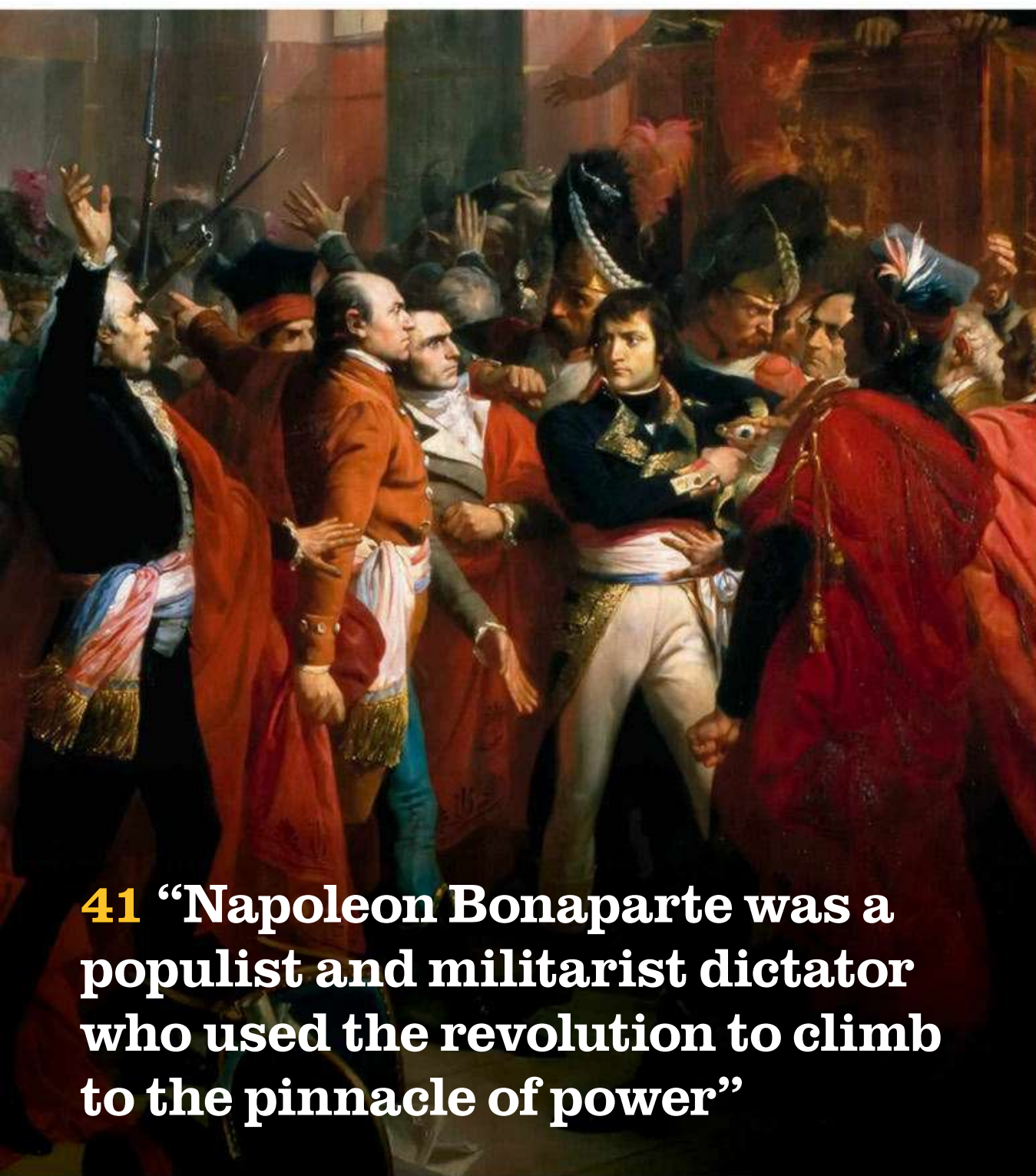


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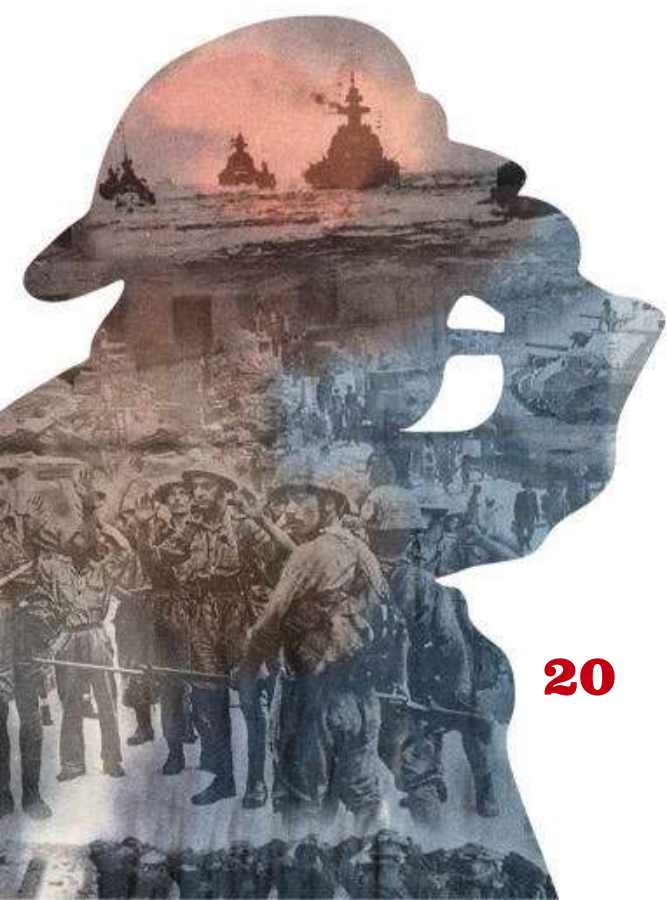
GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN/ROBERT HARDING/
ILLUSTRATION RACHEL DICKENS/DERRY CITY AND STRABANE DISTRICT COUNCIL



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41 “Napoleon Bonaparte was a populist and militarist dictator who used the revolution to climb to the pinnacle of power”



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EYE-OPENER

Prehistoric phenomenon

Made from chalk and decorated with intricate carvings, this 5,000-year-old artefact is on public display for the first time since its discovery in 2015.

The drum-shaped object – found alongside a chalk ball and bone pin in the grave of three children near Burton Agnes, East Yorkshire in 2015 – may have been used as sculptural art or as a talisman to protect the dead. Its markings, including three holes believed to represent the bodies, recall an artistic style used in the era in which Stonehenge was built. The sculpture is very

similar to three objects known as the “Folkton Drums”, found just 15 miles away in 1889, which were also buried near the remains of a child.

These parallels, and the clues that the find may offer about cultural connections across Britain and Ireland, prompted British Museum curator Neil Wilkin to describe it as “the most important piece of prehistoric art to be found in Britain in the past 100 years”. The artefact is on display at the British Museum’s World of Stonehenge exhibition in London until 17 July.

The 5,000-year-old drum-shaped artefact is thought to have been used as a talisman rather than as a musical instrument



 TALKING POINTS

The long, long 19th century



Has the imagery of the 19th century – corsets, cowboys, cigars – become a wider visual shorthand for “the past”? The suggestion prompted a debate that **ANNA WHITELOCK** watched unfold

Historical consultant **Hallie Rubenhold** (@HallieRubenhold) noted on Twitter in February that “a lot of people’s concepts of ‘the past’... are decidedly coloured by the 19th century... It’s like the century has become a visual shorthand for ‘the past’, and I wonder how this started. I feel [that] Hollywood, with its constantly reinforced tropes and clichés, is in part to blame... I can’t tell you how many cigar-smoking Georgians I’ve encountered in scripts, as well as people playing poker. Every corset seems to look like those worn in the 1880s. Lots of bad guys [were] packing revolvers in the 18th century, too, apparently.”

Her comments sparked a debate about the shadow cast over our view of the past by the 19th century. Historian and broadcaster **Greg Jenner** (@Greg_Jenner) agreed that the period has become blurred in the popular imagination with other centuries, noting that “many people see the 18th and 19th centuries as [having] fundamentally the same technology and culture, until the ‘steampunk’ aesthetic separates them”. University of Oxford historian **Morgan Golf-French** (@zeno_thankyou) made the interesting observation that “a large part of my teaching (on the 15th to 18th centuries) is untangling assumptions rooted in the 19th century... [including about] how political parties,

empires, laws etc functioned.”

But why have the images and narratives of the 19th century struck such a chord? Self-described “contrarian” **David Brady** (@AntiProfessor) thinks that it might be in part due to “the explosion of illustrated publications – including romantic ‘historical’ ones – in the 19th century”, while **Dr Jenny Lee** (@Jenny_R_Lee) suggested that it could be because “in the (long) 19th century people started to conceptualise the past, from the professionalisation of history as an academic subject to the resurrection [and] invention of the past by nationalists. Our view of the past is mediated through imagery and imaginations.”

Other people pointed to the fact that the 19th century is relatively recent, historically speaking. **Polly Dymock** (@pollsstar) noted that “my grandparents were born in the late [19th century] and told me about their lives”. And **Clare Kirk** (@digupancestors) suggested that “19th-century photography could partly explain this. It is the closest we can get to seeing the actual past, and might mean that Victorian images become synonymous in our minds with how we imagine people who lived long before us.”

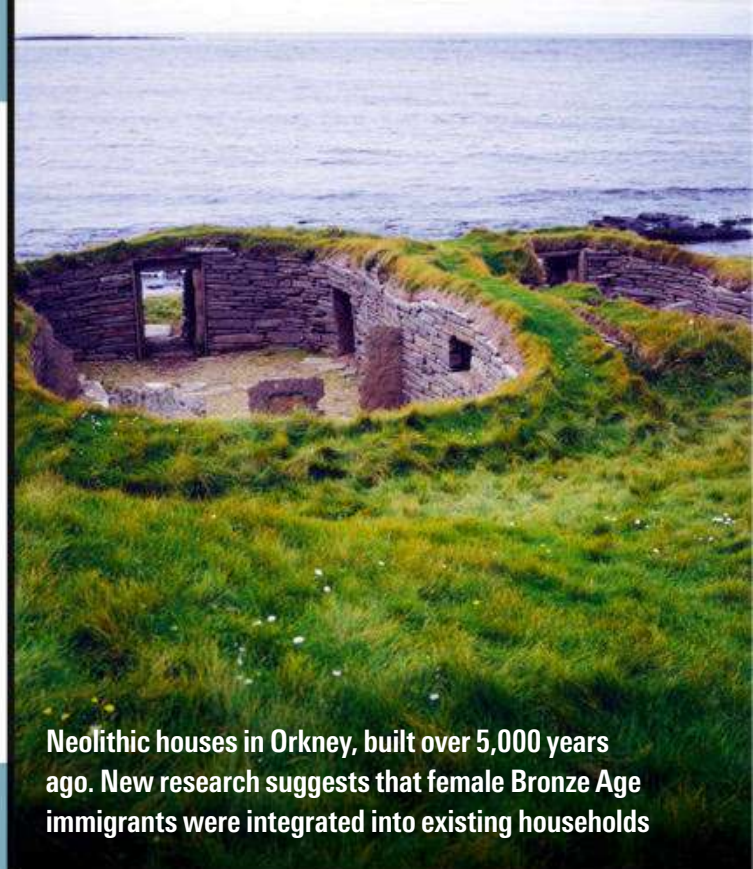
It’s fascinating to explore the forces that shape our view of the past – and worth considering how subsequent generations might view the culture of today. 

Anna Whitelock is professor of history at City, University of London

// Nineteenth-century photography is the closest we can get to seeing the actual past //



ILLUSTRATION BY KATE HAZELL



Neolithic houses in Orkney, built over 5,000 years ago. New research suggests that female Bronze Age immigrants were integrated into existing households

BRONZE AGE

Immigration to Orkney “dominated by women”

During the Bronze Age, an influx of immigrants significantly altered the population of the archipelago of Orkney. It was a dramatic change – and, unusually, incomers who settled and had children were predominantly women, a new study suggests.

Researchers from the universities of Huddersfield and Edinburgh studied human remains from a site on the north coast of the island of Westray. Using archaeology and DNA analysis, they concluded that a large number of people arrived in Orkney in the early Bronze Age, between 4,500 and 3,500 years ago, and that they shared some of their genetic heritage with inhabitants of an area north of the Black Sea. Though such migration wasn’t uncommon across Europe in that period, it had previously been thought that Orkney’s population was largely insular at the time.

Additionally, the project team discovered that male lineages of the Neolithic population persisted for at least another 1,000 years, and weren’t rapidly displaced by incoming male livestock farmers as typically seen elsewhere. Experts suggest that reasons for this may include the stability of Orkney’s Neolithic system of social power and inheritance down the male line, combined with the connection of lineages to particular farming households, plus a preference for marrying women from farther afield. Male heads of household were thus equipped to survive difficult times, and tended to partner with incoming women from elsewhere in Europe. 

GETTY IMAGES/JACOB L. BONGERS/GETTY IMAGES

HISTORY IN THE NEWS

A selection of the stories hitting the **history headlines**

Peruvians “reassembled dead” after colonial looting ▼

They appear to be particularly macabre sculptures: skulls and vertebrae threaded on to posts and buried in tombs along Peru’s Pacific coast. Yet new research suggests that they may represent attempts by the area’s Chincha people to restore the remains of the dead after they were desecrated by European colonisers in the 16th century. Looters would have disturbed the bones in their search for gold and silver buried in bundles of textiles and placed with bodies in their tombs. Indigenous people seem to then have reassembled and reburied the remains.



Peru’s Chincha people may have been keen to restore their ancestors’ remains because it was believed they should be intact for the afterlife



The moai in the Natural History Museum in Santiago. The monument has now been returned to Rapa Nui, 2,000 miles off Chile’s coast

▲ Chile returns moai statue to Rapa Nui after 150 years

The hundreds of giant stone heads that dot the landscape of Rapa Nui, also known as Easter Island, are among the world’s most captivating historical sights. Indeed, these *moai* – believed by islanders to represent or embody the spirits of their ancestors – have proved so alluring that at least 12 have been removed since the first arrival of Europeans in the 18th century. Now one such monument has been restored to its original home after the government of Chile, of which the island is a territory, agreed to return it after more than a century away.

In February, the 715kg statue – which has been held in the Chilean capital, Santiago, since 1870 – departed the city’s Natural History Museum, to be shipped back to the island. The move is part of an ongoing campaign by Rapa Nui residents to reclaim its moai, another of which has been stored at the British Museum since 1888. In 2019, museum representatives travelled to Rapa Nui to discuss the return of the moai and how to preserve the statues on the island.

►► Turn to page 50 to read Cat Jarman’s feature on **the history of Rapa Nui**

► Climate change “puts artefacts at risk”, archaeologists warn

Some of Britain’s buried historical treasures may face an uncertain future as shifting weather patterns alter the composition of the nation’s peatlands, experts believe.

Perhaps as many as 22,500 British archaeological sites lie in such waterlogged terrain, which covers roughly 10 per cent of the UK’s land. Because peat has a stable chemical composition and contains low levels of oxygen, materials such as wood and textiles do not rot in it, so may in some cases be preserved for centuries. However, if the soil dries out as a result of changes in the climate, oxygen levels can rise, sparking a potentially rapid process of decomposition.

One site at which it’s thought such a process may already have begun is Magna, an ancient Roman fort in



This baby’s shoe is among the artefacts that were preserved in peatland near the Roman fort of Magna for around 2,000 years

Northumberland. In a bid to assess the speed of the change and the issues it may cause, archaeologists are collecting data on rainfall, temperature and the chemical makeup of the area’s soil. It’s hoped that the results can be used to develop potential solutions – and to preserve valuable artefacts for future generations.

Holocaust book tops best-seller list after school ban ▼

A Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel chronicling one family’s experiences of the Holocaust has become an online bestseller after it was banned by a US school board. *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* by Art Spiegelman was removed from the eighth-grade syllabus by trustees of McMinn County Schools in Tennessee, who argued that its inclusion of nude figures and swearwords made it inappropriate for 13-year-old readers. While noting the “horrible, brutal and cruel” events on which the book is based, one member of the board – which was split on the decision – described its inclusion in the curriculum as “not wise or healthy”.

Following the ruling, various editions of the book, which was serialised from 1980 and first published in a collected form in 1986, have reached the top of Amazon’s bestseller lists. H





KEITH LOWE ON... THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS

// Russian nationalists have always felt betrayed by Ukraine //

There is nothing new about the tensions between Russia and Ukraine. Ukrainians have been trying to disentangle themselves from Russia for more than a century, but it has always refused to let go.

At the beginning of the 20th century, today's Ukraine was split between the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. The Russian part was officially known in Moscow as "Little Russia", and was subjected to a series of repressive measures to keep it that way. When Ukrainians began agitating for greater autonomy in 1906, Tsar Nicholas II reacted by arresting Ukrainian activists.

In the aftermath of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, Ukrainian nationalists tried again: they announced their independence, and raised an army to try to protect it. In the civil, ethnic and class wars that followed, the new Ukrainian army lost out on both sides. In the west, they lost to the Poles, who annexed large parts of the regions of Volhynia and Galicia. In the east, they lost to the Bolsheviks, who forced the bulk of Ukraine to join the Soviet Union. On paper, Ukraine was now an autonomous republic, but it was still controlled centrally from Moscow. In the 1930s, it was subjected to both Stalinist terror and the Holodomor, a man-made famine that resulted in millions of deaths.

Ukraine's next opportunity to break away from Russia came during the Second World War. After the German invasion in 1941, some Ukrainian nationalist groups allied themselves with the Nazis in the mistaken hope that it might help them achieve independence. Some of these groups actively assisted with the Holocaust, before turning their attention to ethnically cleansing the Polish minorities in the western borderlands. As a consequence, the Soviets were able to paint all Ukrainian partisans as fascists,

regardless of their true politics. Partisans continued to resist Soviet domination for the next decade.

When the dust finally settled in the mid-1950s, much had changed. Stalin had moved the borders, forcing Poland to give up a large amount of its territory to Ukraine, but this was not so much of a gift to Ukraine as a land-grab for the Soviet Union as a whole. To dispel some of the ethnic tensions, a massive population exchange had taken place between Poland and Ukraine – but, again, this was not for Ukraine's benefit, but simply a way to impose Soviet control. In the years that followed, Russian speakers were encouraged to migrate to Ukraine to promote greater integration into the Soviet project. It is these Russian-speaking minorities that are at the heart of today's crisis.

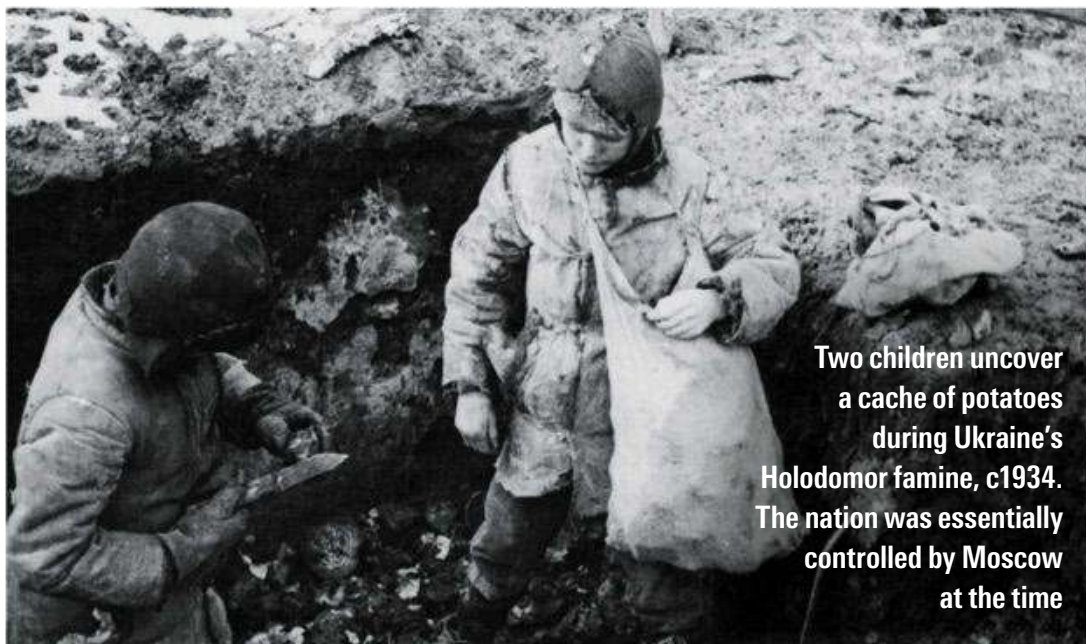
Ukraine did not manage to win independence until the collapse of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Once again, a moment of chaos provided the opportunity. In August 1991, while the Soviets were distracted by an attempted military coup and their own impending collapse, Ukraine unilaterally announced its independence. This was quickly ratified in a popular referendum three months later.

Russian-Ukrainian relations have never been the same since. Russian nationalists, including president Vladimir Putin, have always felt betrayed by Ukraine, which they still regard as "Little Russia". Putin has often claimed that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people", and accused Ukrainian leaders of being little more than foreign puppets.

Just as Ukraine capitalised on Russian turmoil in the 1990s, Putin has also tried to capitalise on Ukrainian turmoil. In 2014, when pro-Russian leader Viktor Yanukovich was ousted during protests about the government's decision to suspend signing an agreement that would have brought Ukraine closer to the EU, Putin reacted by marching into Crimea and annexing it. Russia also stoked anti-Ukrainian sentiment in two of Ukraine's easternmost provinces, Luhansk and Donetsk, and provided military support to Russian separatists there. Fighting has continued in these regions ever since.

The current crisis is much worse than that of 2014. Despite Putin's pretence that his full-scale military assault on Ukraine is merely a "peace-keeping mission" designed to protect Russian-speaking minorities in Luhansk and Donetsk from Ukrainian "aggression", the reality is very different: it is part of a long-term plan to restore Russian control over territory it lost after the end of the Cold War.

What is happening in Ukraine today sets a dangerous precedent. The Baltic States were also once a part of Greater Russia, whose populations also include large Russian minorities. If the same kind of aggression is reproduced against these countries – which, unlike Ukraine, are members of Nato – the implications for the whole of Europe could be utterly devastating. **H**



Two children uncover
a cache of potatoes
during Ukraine's
Holodomor famine, c1934.
The nation was essentially
controlled by Moscow
at the time

.....
Keith Lowe
is a writer and
historian whose
books include
Savage Continent:
Europe in the
Aftermath of
World War II
(St Martin's
Press, 2012)



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ANNIVERSARIES

HELEN CARR highlights events that took place in April in history



26 APRIL 1937

Guernica is battered by a three-hour bombing raid

Franco's allies unleash hell on an unsuspecting Basque town

The afternoon of 26 April 1937 began like any other for the inhabitants of Guernica, a Basque town east of Bilbao. The weekly market was in full swing, with visiting shoppers swelling the town's population to around 10,000 people. Soon, though, the peace was shattered when a fleet of bombers descended from the skies.

At 4.40pm, the first wave of bombers

screamed into the airspace over the town. Over the course of that afternoon, dozens of German and Italian aircraft arrived, carpet-bombing the town and killing indiscriminately.

As well as obliterating houses, the bombers targeted the municipal water supply to prevent the townspeople from extinguishing the raging fires. The town's residential build-

ings were largely constructed with timber, and the German aircraft carried incendiary bombs – clearly intending to create an inferno at a devastating level.

One eyewitness, a priest named Father Alberto Onaindía, described the horror as “diabolic”. He spoke of fires breaking out everywhere, and “defenceless inhabitants” running through the streets, taking cover under trees and inside houses as they were strafed by low-flying aircraft. The harassment continued into the evening until the aircraft flew away at about 7.45pm, leaving the town a smoking ruin.

Estimates of casualties vary widely, but judging by accounts from nearby hospitals that received the dead and injured following the attack, 1,645 people were killed and almost 900 more injured. And it is possible

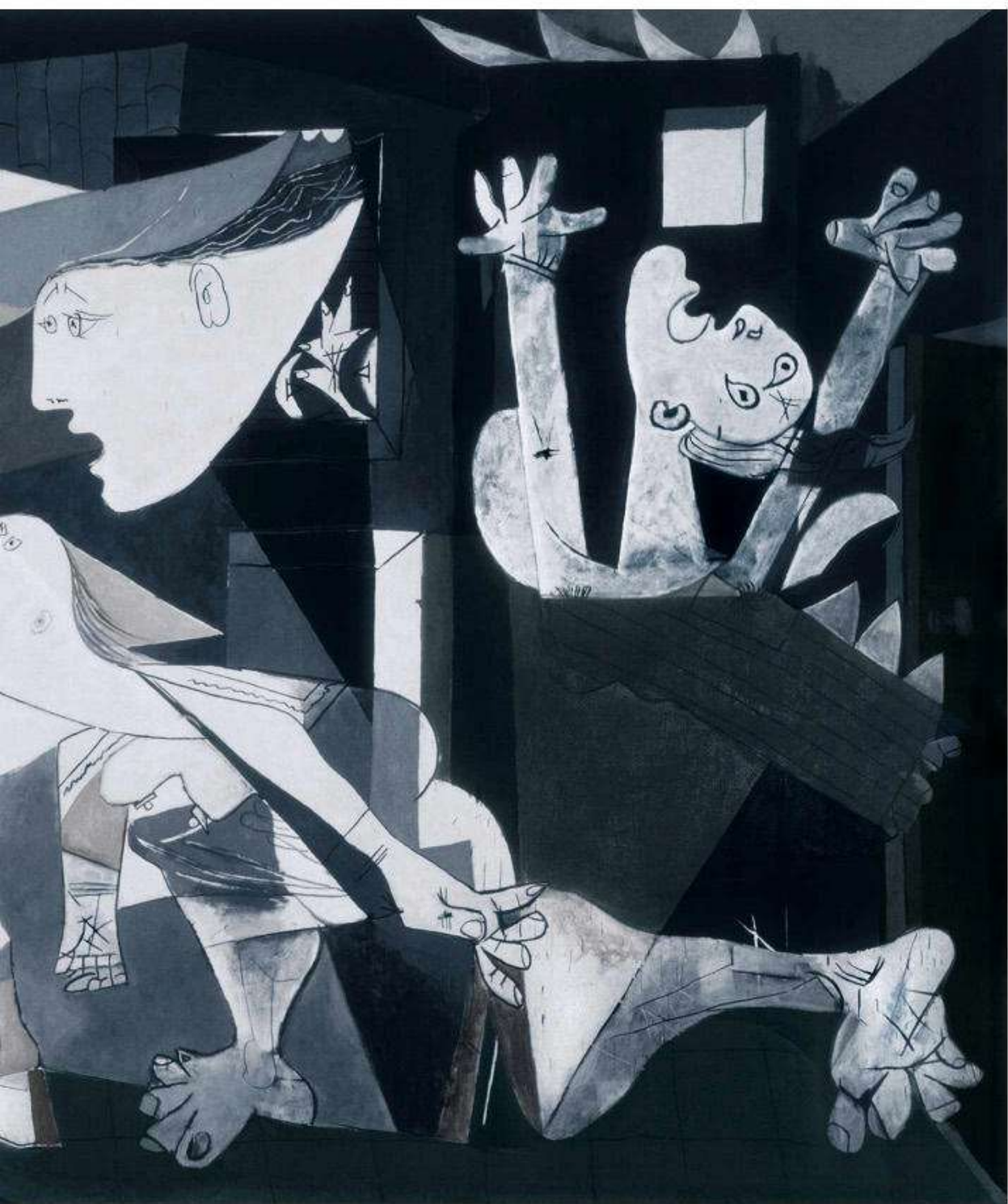
AKG IMAGES

Highwayman Dick Turpin flees from pursuers in this 19th-century print



7 APRIL 1739

Notorious highwayman Dick Turpin is hanged in York. On the day of his execution, Turpin becomes a celebrity: members of the public visit his cell to speak with him, apparently buying drinks from his gaoler. He hires five professional mourners to follow him to the gallows.



Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, created in 1937 in response to the town's bombing by pro-Franco aircraft. Initial accounts suggested that 1,645 people were killed in the raid

that the final death toll was even higher.

The ruthless attack on Guernica was intended as a sadistic show of support for General Francisco Franco's Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War. The raid was masterminded by Colonel Wolfram von Richthofen, chief of staff of the Condor Legion – a Nazi unit sent to serve with the Nationalists.

Soon after the attack, Pablo Picasso created a piece that would become one of his most famous works of art. *Guernica*, a vast black-and-white painting depicting that fateful afternoon, became an iconic protest against war and all its horrors.

Despite public outcry, it was not until 1939, at the end of the Civil War, that the debris was finally cleared from the town. Today, the merciless attack on Guernica remains etched into Spain's collective memory.

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

27 APRIL 1865

The *Sultana* explodes on the Mississippi

The worst waterway disaster in US history claims 1,700 lives

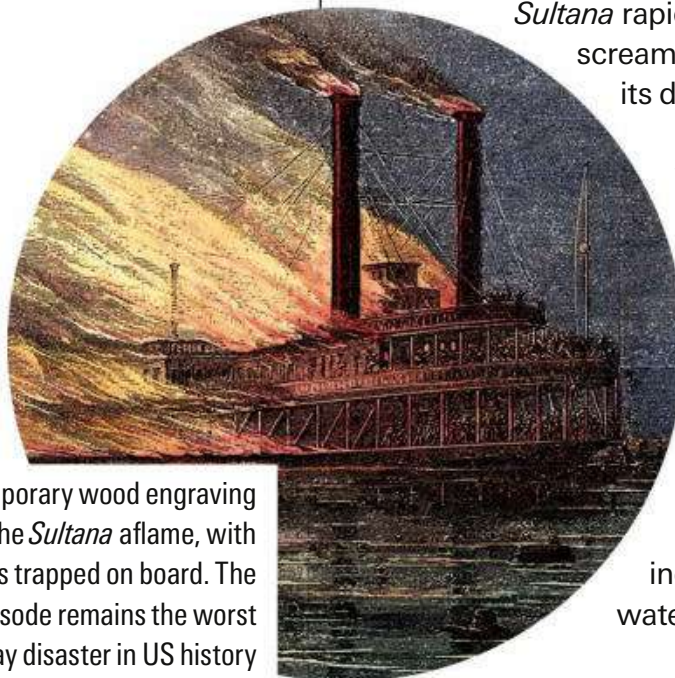
On a late April day in 1865, the steamship *Sultana* was puffing up the Mississippi river. It was returning from a journey south to New Orleans on which it had carried a pivotal piece of information: news of the death of President Abraham Lincoln on 15 April, following his shooting by Confederate sympathiser John Wilkes Booth the previous day. Coming hard on the heels of the surrender by Confederate General Lee, marking the effective end of the American Civil War, the *Sultana*'s captain, James Cass Mason, had been eager to get the news to the southern states as fast as possible.

Having delivered the tidings, he turned north once more. Calling at Vicksburg, Mississippi, he took a tempting money-making opportunity. Thousands of newly released Union prisoners of war needed transportation home to the north, at a tidy per-man fee. So Mason packed the *Sultana* with just under 2,000 troops – but the ship was designed to carry fewer than 400 passengers.

As the overladen vessel juddered out of Vicksburg towards Memphis, Tennessee, it battled strong currents. Seven miles after reaching Memphis, in the middle of the night, three of the ship's boilers exploded, killing some sleeping soldiers instantly and sending burning debris crashing through the vessel. The mostly wooden *Sultana* rapidly went up in flames as its screaming passengers leapt from its deck into the chilly river.

Most of the men on board were killed. Of the survivors, one floated on the carcass of a mule while others clung to trees and roots. Several died of hypothermia. The final death toll has been estimated at more than 1,700.

The *Sultana* is still at the bottom of the river, and the incident remains the worst waterway disaster in US history.



A contemporary wood engraving of the *Sultana* aflame, with thousands trapped on board. The tragic episode remains the worst waterway disaster in US history

Aviator Harriet Quimby,
pictured c1910



16 APRIL 1912

Harriet Quimby becomes the first woman to fly solo across the English Channel. Launching her plane from Dover into thick cloud and fog, the American aviator lands near Boulogne less than an hour later. She would die in a plane accident that July.



A cast of one of the victims of the eruption at Pompeii. The ancient city was uncovered by a Spanish engineer in 1748

ALAMY

APRIL 1748

The ruins of Pompeii are uncovered

Subsequent excavations unearth skeletons hidden below the ash

In AD 79, Pliny the Younger watched from his vantage point in Misenum as a blanket of volcanic ash from erupting Mount Vesuvius smothered the nearby city of Pompeii. He described the disaster as “if the lamp had been put out in a dark room”.

More than 16 centuries later, the catastrophe was revisited anew. In early April 1748, Spanish engineer Rocque Joaquín de Alcubierre was excavating an area known locally as La Cività (“the settlement”). Tunnelling through petrified ash and debris, he came across the remains of Pompeii.

Under his supervision, 12 men began digging into the hill of La Cività, delving 20 metres below the surface. They faced various perils during the excavation, from tunnel collapse to toxic gas emissions.

On around 19 April, the workers made a sobering discovery: a man’s skeleton, surrounded by coins. This was the first of a number of human remains to be discovered at the site; many had been rapidly cloaked in hot ash during the eruption, creating impressions of their bodies that survived over many centuries. Remains like these are still being

unearthed by archaeologists today, almost three centuries after Alcubierre’s discovery.

The driving force behind the initial excavation at Pompeii – and indeed earlier work at nearby Herculaneum, destroyed in the same eruption – was Charles VII of Naples (king of Naples and Sicily, and later also king of Spain). He was eager to pursue lines of archaeological enquiry into accidental discoveries made near his newly built villa at Portici, almost adjacent to Herculaneum. His interest in the flourishing field of archaeology is demonstrated by the fact that many of the finds were originally kept in a museum at his villa or used to decorate his palace.

The work at Pompeii in 1748 changed the course of archaeological practice forever, transforming excavation from the pursuit of treasures to the careful research and analysis of past lives lived.



A statue of Robert the Bruce at Stirling Castle. The Scottish leader held on to Berwick for 15 years

8 APRIL 1318

The Scots capture Berwick-upon-Tweed

Robert the Bruce's men strike a mighty blow against the English

Robert the Bruce appeared unstoppable after his decisive Scottish victory at Bannockburn in 1314. Over the next four years he crushed English power in Scotland, culminating in the capture of Berwick-upon-Tweed in April 1318. This port and stronghold was an important staging point for any invasion north of the border, so losing it was a dagger in the heart to English rule in Scotland.

However, Robert the Bruce was not personally responsible for Berwick's capture. Rather, it was spearheaded by a Scottish noble called Sir James Douglas, Lord of Douglas, who led a raiding party over Berwick's walls on 8 April 1318. Fighting broke out inside the town, but Douglas and his men persevered, stoking anarchy among the townspeople and garrisoned soldiers, and ultimately capturing the town for the Scots. The castle itself remained strong for another 11 weeks until it finally capitulated following a harrowing siege – without supplies of food, those inside were forced to surrender.

The recovery of Berwick by the English became a national prerogative. In June 1319, forces mustered at Newcastle but were savagely pushed back by Robert the Bruce as he invaded the north of England. Berwick remained in Scottish control until 1333, when it returned to English hands following the battle of Halidon Hill, during the Second War of Scottish Independence. **H**

Helen Carr is a historian, writer and producer. She is the author of *The Red Prince* (Oneworld, 2021), and co-author and editor of *What Is History, Now?* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021)

WHY WE SHOULD REMEMBER...

30 APRIL 1952

The translation of Anne Frank's diary, a window onto the Holocaust

BY **ZOË WAXMAN**

When was Anne Frank's diary first published?

Originally written in Dutch, the diary was first published in 1947 in the Netherlands as *Het Achterhuis: Dagboek-brieven 12 Juni 1942–1 Augustus 1944* (*The Secret Annex: Diary-Letters 12 June 1942–1 August 1944*). Frank herself had chosen the title for the book, which she planned to publish after the war. "The title alone," she observed, "would be enough to make people think it was a detective story."

What was the significance of the English translation?

In 1952, two English language editions were published, in the US and the UK. The title was changed to *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. The emphasis was on the work of a young person whose life had been tragically cut short. The book was successful in the US, as well as in France and Germany, but in the UK there was little interest at first and by 1953 it was out of print. However, it eventually became a bestseller and has now been translated into more than 70 languages.

What does the diary tell us about Anne and her life?

Frank's diary stops before her arrest and deportation to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Readers are drawn to the diary because it allows us supposedly to read about the Holocaust while not actually having to deal with its horrors. It reveals a highly articulate, vivacious young girl who, although suffering the misery and stress of hiding in cramped and difficult conditions, still manages to retain – at least to some extent – what Frank herself calls her "illogical gaiety".

Why should we remember it today?

Though Anne's diary stops before the last appalling months of her life unfold, our interest in the Holocaust must not. We are nearing a time when no witness to the Holocaust will remain alive, so it

is now left to us – those born after the events – to confront the daunting task of retrieving some sort of meaning from the tragedy.

Anne Frank was one of 1.5 million Jewish children murdered during the Holocaust. Her story reminds us not only of the extremity and magnitude of this event, but also of the intensely personal nature of Holocaust experiences. Today it has become more important than ever to treat the experiences of the victims of each and every episode of ethnic cleansing, genocide and war with the respect and cautious humility they deserve. **H**



Anne Frank writing at her desk, c1941. Her diary reminds us of the personal dimension of the Holocaust



Zoë Waxman is a departmental lecturer in modern Jewish history at the University of Oxford



MICHAEL WOOD ON...

WHY MYTHOLOGY PREVAILS OVER REALITY

// The Arthur myth is British-Celtic history as people dreamed it was //

I took the train to Oxford the other day, to walk some old haunts. Down an alley just by the station, are the scant ruins of Osney Abbey. Founded in 1129, it was

demolished after the Reformation and plundered for building materials. All that remains now is one medieval timber-framed building and a derelict stone arch.

Oxford is, of course, a place whose fictions seem as real as its histories. *Lord of the Rings*; *The Chronicles of Narnia*; *Alice in Wonderland*; *His Dark Materials* – all were written within yards of this spot, and all are proof of the power of stories, the seduction of imaginary worlds. And it was here at Osney in the 1130s that a young Welsh cleric, Geoffrey of Monmouth, made perhaps the greatest single contribution by any writer or poet to the myth of King Arthur.

Myths and legends are often created in times of crisis, and Geoffrey's was an age of troubles and pessimism. A generation after the Norman conquest, there was anarchy in England and a savage revolt in Wales. History was, as always, up for grabs – for victors and vanquished, for those in power and those resisting. So it was with the tale of Arthur.

In the 1120s, a new generation of historians were writing texts to help their foreign rulers understand the lands they had so violently appropriated. But the Anglo-centric bias of these second-generation Anglo-Normans – men such as Henry of Huntingdon and William of Malmesbury – was deeply offensive to some,

especially the Welsh. William's *Deeds of the English Kings*, the hot history book of the 1120s, made it clear what he thought about the Welsh: the Britons, he said, prefer to tell "idle fictions" of Arthur rather than real history. But the new history of Britain was to be English, just as its future was English. Forget the "fable and idle song" about Arthur. The British world was England's now.

Young Geoffrey was infuriated. His response was to construct the literary smash hit of the High Middle Ages. Writing from the "heart of Britain" – he never once mentions "England" – he set out to provide the British with a national mythology masquerading as history. Where Bede and William of Malmesbury had written their books within the confines of historical sources – albeit directed by a Christian conception of time – Geoffrey cut loose from mere historical fact. Citing the authority of a lost history of the Britons, which he claimed to have translated, he produced a dazzling fiction spanning 2,000 years and featuring 99 kings. This was British-Celtic history as people dreamed it might have been.

At its centre is the figure of Arthur, a hero who bestrides Europe like a colossus, a Napoleon of the Dark Ages. The whole tale is here: his birth, life, battles, betrayal and tragic death. Here are Uther Pendragon, Guinevere and Merlin, even Caliburn the sword – the future Excalibur. Here, too, are the villain Mordred and the king's final resting place at Avalon, soon to be identified with Glastonbury.

Arthur stories had been told before Geoffrey's day, but what he wrote has seized our imagination ever since. When he put down his pen in Oxford, at some point in the late 1130s, what is perhaps the greatest tale in the myths of the world was about to take Europe by storm. Geoffrey's book inspired countless medieval romancers and chroniclers: Chrétien de Troyes and the courtly love poets, the German poet and composer Wolfram von Eschenbach – not to mention the later British authors of Arthur stories: Malory, Dryden, Tennyson and Cowper Powys, right down to modern myth-makers such as Rosemary Sutcliffe and Bernard Cornwell. The Wikipedia material on modern Arthurian literature runs to nearly 150 pages!

The amazing thing is that Geoffrey's fantasy continues to work its magic. Books are still written claiming that he really did have a lost manuscript telling a real history – the lost tale of an Arthurian empire. It's all proof, if proof were needed, of the seductive power of the story.

In the end, like it or not, all historians are drawn to create narrative – to shape the messy chaos of the past into a coherent whole, however unreachable the reality that lies behind it may be. But in that there's an ever-present danger. For the picture that emerges sometimes exists only in our imaginations – and, whether true or not, the best story usually wins. **H**

Michael Wood

is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series, and his latest book is *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2021). His Twitter handle is @mayavision

BBC

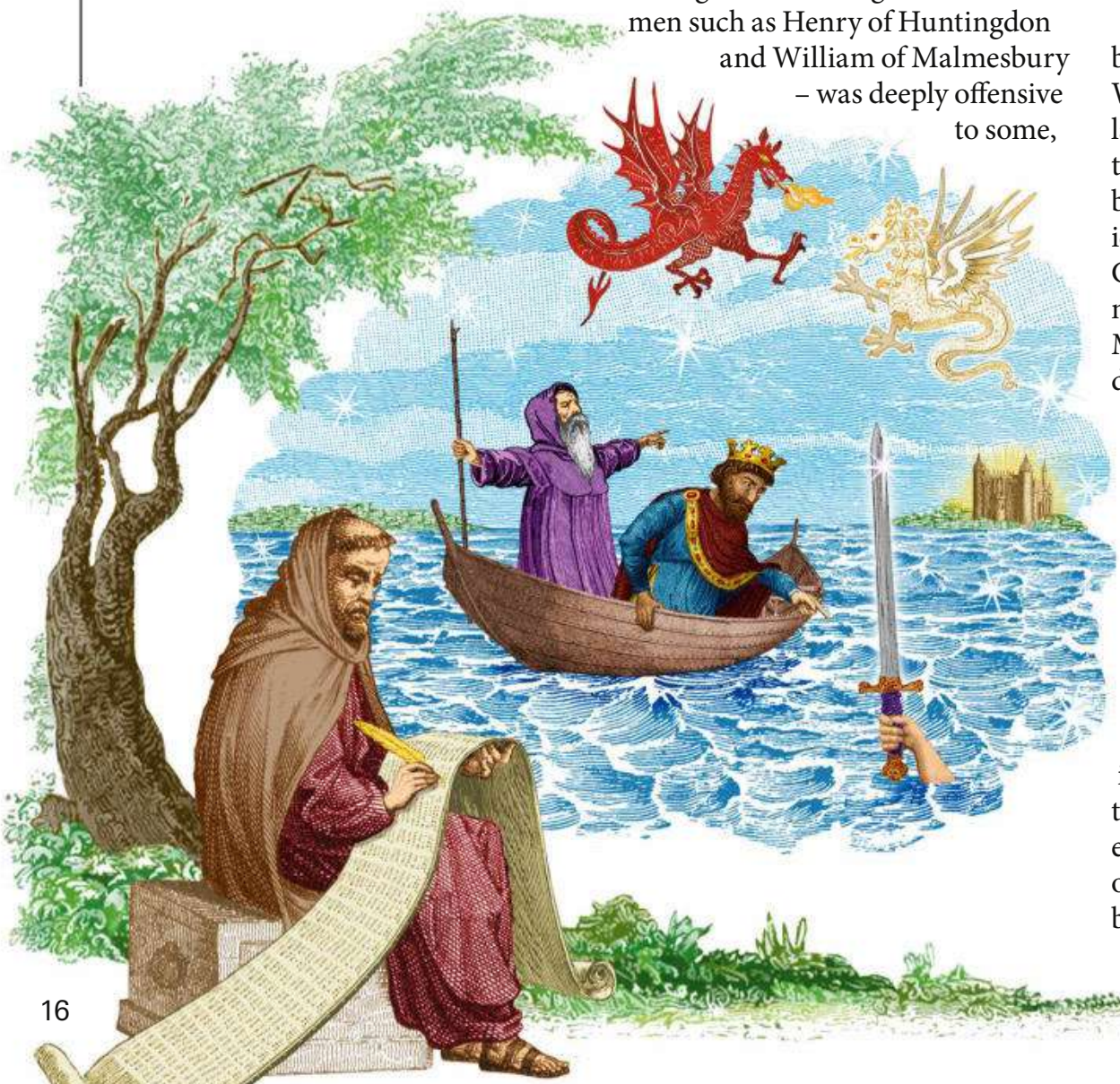


ILLUSTRATION BY FEMKE DE JONG

There are many reasons to leave a gift in your Will to medical research

The most important calls you Grandma

Get your guide to gifts in Wills

Medical research isn't just about scientific discovery – it's about protecting the health of the people we care about for years to come. So if you're hoping that your Will can provide a better, happier, healthier life for those you love, would you consider supporting medical research?

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An 18th-century portrait of Lady Montagu, whose scientific work is lauded by reader Pamela Hider

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Folklore and festivals

One of the qualities of your magazine is the great breadth of subjects that you cover, and in the February issue I particularly enjoyed Francis Young's feature on British folklore (*Lore of the Land*).

It is interesting to see the extent to which some pagan beliefs have been incorporated into the origins of Christianity in this country. Here in Hastings we have an annual Jack in the Green festival [pictured left in 2018] clearly drawing on the Green Man stories from paganism. Surprisingly

the festival was founded only a few years ago, and includes a special service in one of Hastings Old Town's parish churches.

Although it is a eucharist, the service also includes Morris dancing.

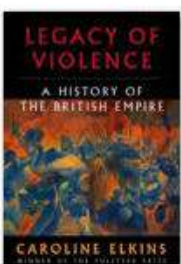
I conducted the service three years ago, and in my sermon I considered the origin of the term "Morris"

dancing. The common view seems to be that it originates as "Moorish dancing", namely

from north Africa. I suggested an alternative view: the month of May has traditionally been considered the month of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and thus Morris dancing might originally have been "Mary's dancing" in her honour. Speaking to people after the service, many agreed with me as to this possibility.

So far as Morris dancing is concerned, I agree with the popular line: "You should make a point of trying every experience once, excepting incest and folk dancing." However, I do admit that Morris dancing is highly complex and skilful.

Revd David Sherwood, Hastings



We reward the *Letter of the Month* writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is **Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire** by Caroline Elkins. You can read our review of the book on page 80

Bad King John (and James, and...)

Your article on the 12 greatest British monarchs (February) prompted me to consider who were the worst monarchs! I can think of six. In chronological order (but not degree of "badness") I would suggest: Stephen, John, Charles I, James II, George IV and Edward VIII. What do other readers think?

Clive Richardson, Bristol

Missing the Merry Monarch

What happened to Charles II in your list of greatest monarchs? He may have been a devious philanderer, but during his tenure there was a veritable flourishing of the arts, sciences and literature which he wholeheartedly encouraged. There were Christopher Wren and Nicholas Hawksmoor in the field of architecture; Edmond Halley and Isaac Newton in astronomy; Samuel Pepys and John Dryden in literature – plus one of the outstanding English composers in Henry Purcell. Probably Charles's greatest achievement was the Royal Society [he granted it a royal charter in 1662], which is still making its mark in the sciences to this day.

Ken Wright, London

Royal omissions

There are three surprising omissions from the list of nominees for Britain's greatest monarch. Surely I am not the only reader who is puzzled (and a little annoyed) by the snubbing of Alfred the Great, Edward I and William III.

If preventing England from being wiped off the map by Danish invaders (Alfred), fathering both the representative parliament and the English statute law (Edward I), or preserving (bloodlessly) England's constitutional monarchy and rule of law from destruction by French-style royal absolutism (William III) do not qualify a monarch for this honour, it is hard to see what can.

The annoyance of historically literate readers will be further aggravated by the perverse inclusion of such failed monarchs as

the narrow-minded, pedantic James I, "the wisest fool in Christendom" (began a quarrel with the Commons leading to the civil war), and George III (tried to turn back the constitutional clock to make the king the de facto executive, and lost the "first British empire", ie America, through his ignorance and reactionary stubbornness).

Allen Bass, Cork City

Editor replies: Thanks for the many letters we've received about this piece. We limited our selections to post-1066 monarchs, meaning that Alfred the Great wasn't eligible for inclusion.

Beyond Wilberforce

Yes, on 25 March 1807 the act that abolished the slave trade in the British empire was legalised (*Anniversaries*, March). But it is not only William Wilberforce who should be commemorated. Thomas Clarkson collected the information from British "slaving ports", which Wilberforce used in parliament. He also worked with many campaigners.

Meanwhile, the *Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, written by an enslaved African who had managed to purchase his freedom, was first published in 1789; it was reprinted eight times and also published in Dutch, German and Russian during his lifetime. But not nearly enough was done to implement the act, so the slave trade increased, and British traders, banks, insurers et al continued to make a fortune. You can find out more in my book *After Abolition: Britain and the Slave Trade Since 1807* (IB Tauris, 2007).

Marika Sherwood, Kent

Gaps in the schedule

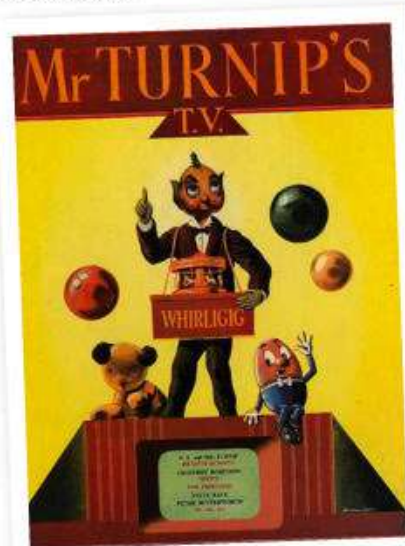
Reading David Hendy's article (March) on the historical provision of children's programmes by the BBC, I was rather disappointed that there was no mention of the two programmes that for me, as an 11-year-old in 1952, were something of a weekly highlight. *Whirligig* (presented by Humphrey Lestocq) and *Saturday Night Special* (presented by Peter Butterworth) were shown on alternating Saturday nights during the early 1950s. They pre-dated *Blue Peter* by several years and were really deserving of inclusion.

David Mason, Midlothian

Forgotten scientific pioneer

You would think that, in writing about her history hero, Edward Jenner (January), vaccinologist Sarah Gilbert might have given a nod to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Her pioneering inoculation

Mr Turnip, a character from *Whirligig* – a BBC show for children, fondly remembered by reader David Mason





William III and Mary II as portrayed on a c18th-century decorative plate. The king's omission from our experts' list of greatest monarchs puzzled reader Allen Bass

experiments laid the groundwork for Jenner's discovery 75 years later, but her contribution is forgotten and her name unknown. This year marks the 300th anniversary of her work, and she deserves recognition.

Pamela Hider, Bedfordshire

Editor replies: Readers who would like to know more about Lady Montagu can find a piece about her, which first appeared in our July 2021 issue, at [historyextra.com/wortleymontagu](https://www.historyextra.com/wortleymontagu)

Unsportsmanlike behaviour?

Most boxing fans would agree with Craig Charles (*My History Hero*, March) that Muhammad Ali was the greatest boxer of his era, if not of all time. What Charles didn't mention was that, when Ali was stripped of his titles and unable to box, his then friend Joe Frazier supported him by personally appealing to US president Richard Nixon for Ali's reinstatement and by providing financial help. Ali later repaid Frazier by publicly insulting him and called him an "Uncle Tom".

Greatest boxer? Probably. Greatest sportsman? Not by a long chalk.

Hugh Gilfedder, Lincolnshire

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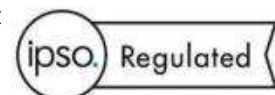
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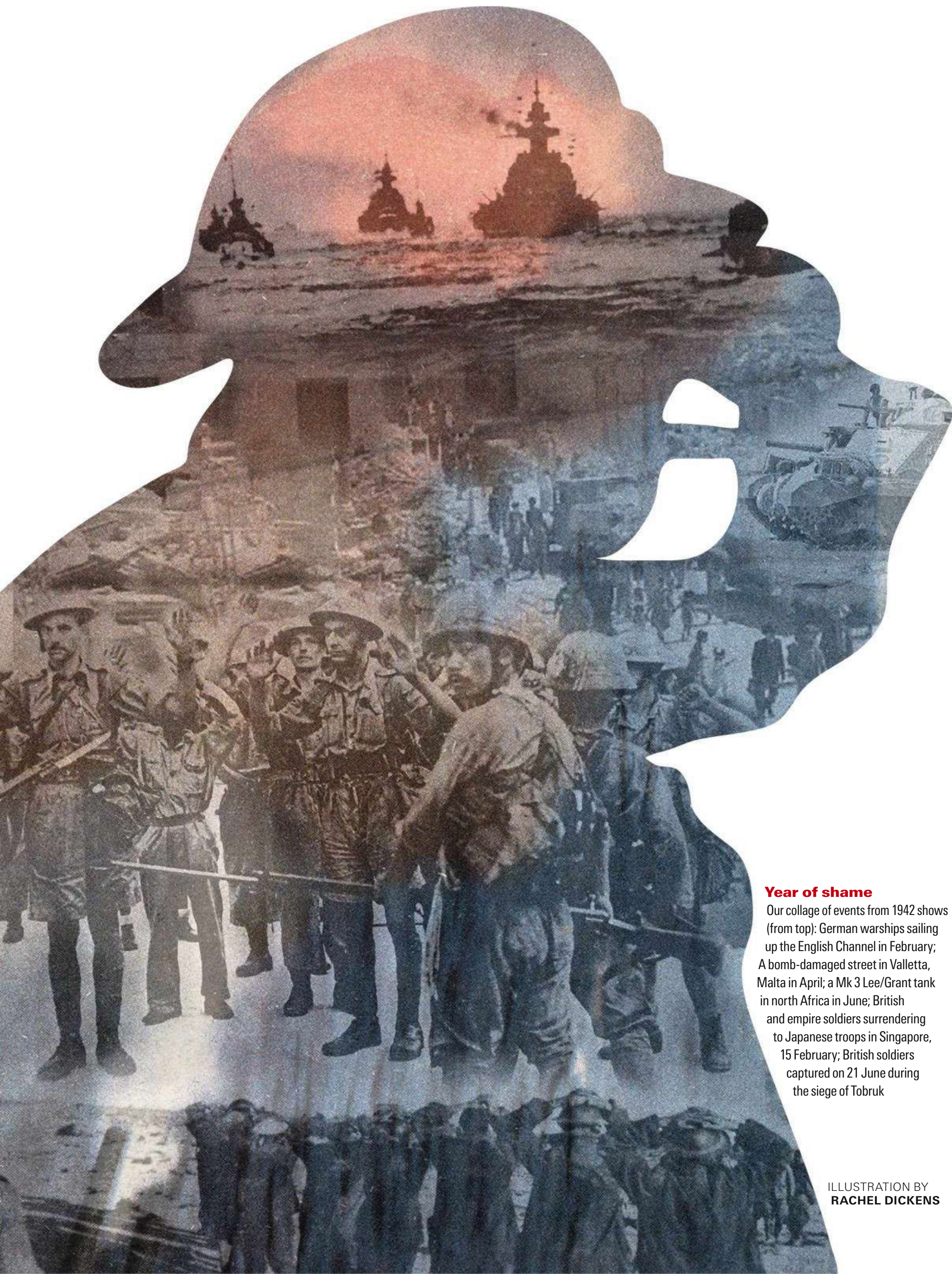
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SAVE WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TODAY

► Page 60





Year of shame

Our collage of events from 1942 shows (from top): German warships sailing up the English Channel in February; A bomb-damaged street in Valletta, Malta in April; a Mk 3 Lee/Grant tank in north Africa in June; British and empire soldiers surrendering to Japanese troops in Singapore, 15 February; British soldiers captured on 21 June during the siege of Tobruk

ILLUSTRATION BY
RACHEL DICKENS



1942

CHURCHILL'S DARKEST HOUR

If 1940 was the year in which Winston Churchill's reputation was forged, 1942 was the one in which it was almost destroyed.

Taylor Downing chronicles a terrible period for the prime minister – both on the battlefield and in the court of public opinion

On Saturday 14 February 1942, Japanese forces advanced to a point just a few miles from the city of Singapore. But in a corner shop in the Yorkshire town of

Dewsbury, the conversation was about events much closer to home. Two days earlier, three large German warships, the *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen*, had sailed up the English Channel and passed through the Strait of Dover in broad daylight. It was the one topic every customer in the Yorkshire grocery store wanted to talk about. “What have they been doing to let them ships escape? They’ve made fools of us, haven’t they?” exclaimed one woman.

The fact that Britannia no longer seemed to rule the waves – could not even stop German warships from passing within a few miles of the white cliffs – caused indignation. “By gosh, it’s time we bucked up, what with one thing and another – there’s only the Russians doing owt,” commented one male customer. “*They* wouldn’t have let them slip, you can bet.” Meanwhile, a woman complained that “it happened under our noses”.

These words were noted by the sales assistant, who was keeping a diary for Mass Observation, the social research project that recorded everyday comments by people across the land. Such remarks, plus other data, were used to provide regular assessments of morale for the Home Intelligence unit of the Ministry of Information. Today, Mass Observation records offer a unique insight into the concerns and attitudes of British people throughout a tumultuous year of the war.

A series of blunders and abysmal communication failures had allowed the German warships to pass within a few miles of the English coast. It was a humiliation for the Royal Navy. The press erupted in outrage, and the normally loyal *Daily Mail* led the charge with an attack not just on the government but specifically on the prime minister, Winston Churchill. Up to this point, most government criticism had avoided attacking Churchill himself. But now the *Daily Mail* asked: “Is it any longer true to say that we trust the prime minister, though we do not trust the government?”

Singapore surrenders

More bad news arrived that same weekend. After two months of retreat down the length of the Malay peninsula (what’s now mainland Malaysia), on 15 February the supposedly impregnable fortress of Singapore capitulated. Almost 100,000 British and imperial troops yielded to a far smaller Japanese force. It was the largest surrender in British history.

TIMELINE

Britain’s year at the brink



7 DECEMBER 1941 TO 31 JANUARY 1942 Japan invades Malaya

As their planes attack Pearl Harbor, Japanese forces invade British-controlled Malaya (now peninsular Malaysia). Fast-moving troops advance through the jungle and overwhelm imperial defenders. British, Indian and Australian forces retreat in disarray, abandoning the local population. Towns and cities fall in quick succession: Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru. Thousands of soldiers surrender and, on 31 January, the last Allied troops retreat across the causeway to the supposedly impregnable fortress of Singapore – but its guns point out to sea and the Japanese are approaching overland.

Indian soldiers on patrol in Malaya, late 1942. Imperial troops failed to halt a rapid Japanese advance through the jungle

Britannia no longer seemed to rule the waves. It could not even stop German warships from approaching the white cliffs

No one could hide a sense of shame – including the prime minister, who later said that the fall of Singapore was “the greatest disaster to British arms which our history records”.

On becoming prime minister in May 1940, Churchill had also appointed himself minister of defence. Every aspect of Britain’s military performance came under his supervision. He was responsible for the strategic direction of Britain’s war effort, so could not escape blame when things went wrong.

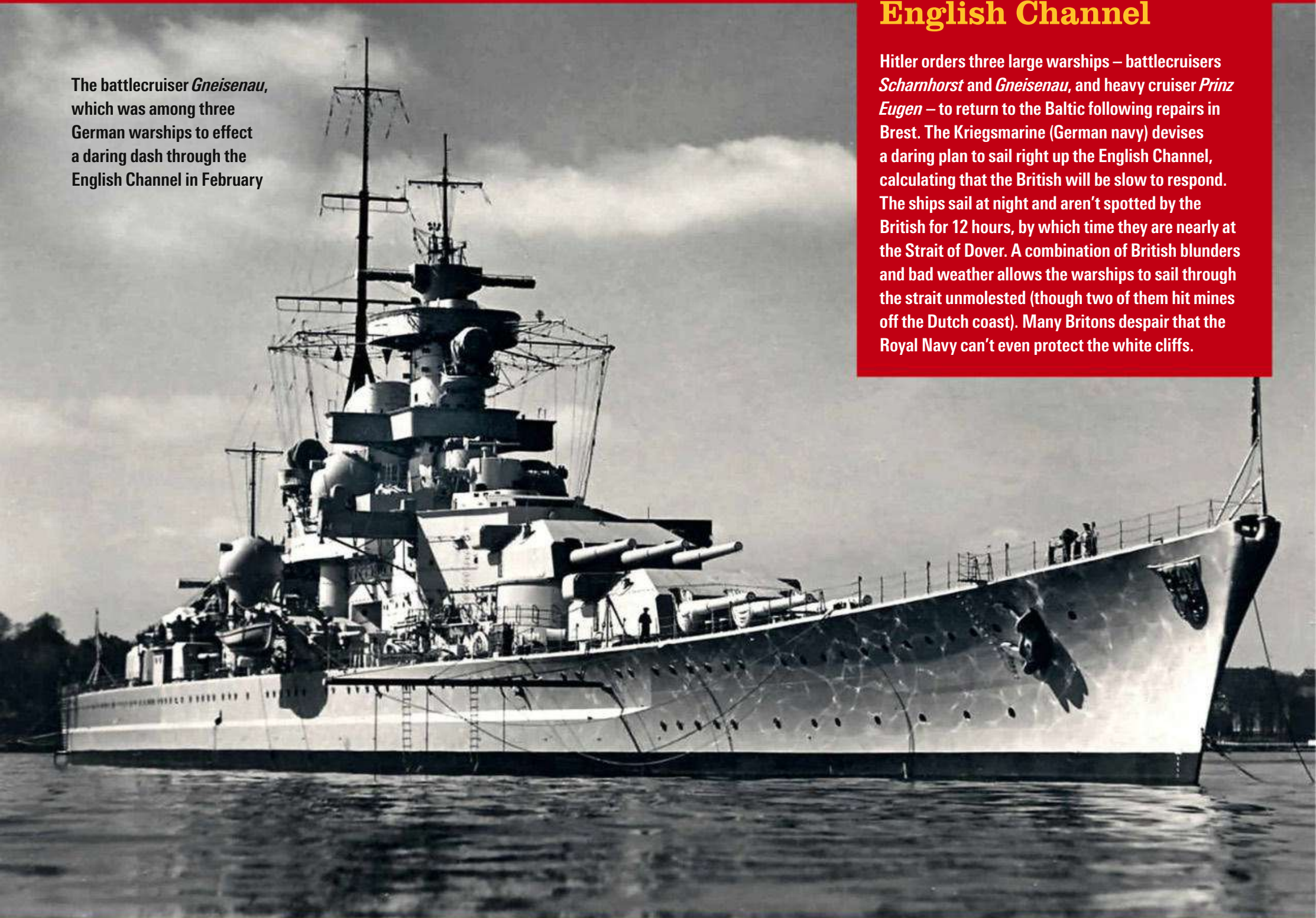
On a Royal Air Force (RAF) base at Digby in Lincolnshire, a young Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) officer detected a new tone among her colleagues after the surrender of Singapore. As a Mass Observer, she dutifully wrote down what she heard. “Up to now,” she recorded, “the government has been criticised often, but always with the reservation ‘Churchill’s all right’. But now Churchill is condemned with the rest.”

12 FEBRUARY 1942

Germans sail up the English Channel

The battlecruiser *Gneisenau*, which was among three German warships to effect a daring dash through the English Channel in February

Hitler orders three large warships – battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, and heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* – to return to the Baltic following repairs in Brest. The Kriegsmarine (German navy) devises a daring plan to sail right up the English Channel, calculating that the British will be slow to respond. The ships sail at night and aren't spotted by the British for 12 hours, by which time they are nearly at the Strait of Dover. A combination of British blunders and bad weather allows the warships to sail through the strait unmolested (though two of them hit mines off the Dutch coast). Many Britons despair that the Royal Navy can't even protect the white cliffs.



As one young WAAF said: "A month ago, if people had been talking about Churchill like this, we'd have called them fifth columnists, but now..." One of her friends said: "It's time we had a new government – Churchill's taking too much upon himself these days." Another was reported as saying: "He roared all right in his time, but he's outlived it."

Churchill was thrown into a mood of despair by the disasters of that fateful weekend. After a cabinet meeting on 16 February, Foreign Office civil servant Sir Alexander Cadogan wrote in his diary: "PM truculent and angry – and hawing [vacillating]." The next day, Churchill told the House of Commons that he would not allow a debate on the fall of Singapore, aiming to avoid a public discussion at such a tense time "in a mood of panic". MPs were outraged. Labour MP Frederick Bellenger told the prime minister that "there is in the country, and indeed in



Churchill with his daughter Mary, who wrote that "Papa is at a very low ebb"

the house at the present moment, a feeling that we have not got the right kind of persons to direct this war to a satisfactory conclusion... we have not got the right kind of government." At this, the house cheered.

"Papa is at a very low ebb," Churchill's daughter Mary wrote after a private lunch with her father later that month. "He is not too well physically and he is worn down by the continuous crushing pressure of events. He is saddened – appalled by events."

Outclassed again

The military disasters continued throughout the spring of 1942. In Burma (Myanmar), British and imperial troops were once again totally outclassed by mobile Japanese forces. After the capture of Rangoon on 9 March, British-led troops retreated 900 miles across jungles, mountains and ravines. When they crossed into India at the beginning of May,

Allied prisoners of war march through Singapore after its fall to Japan on 15 February 1942

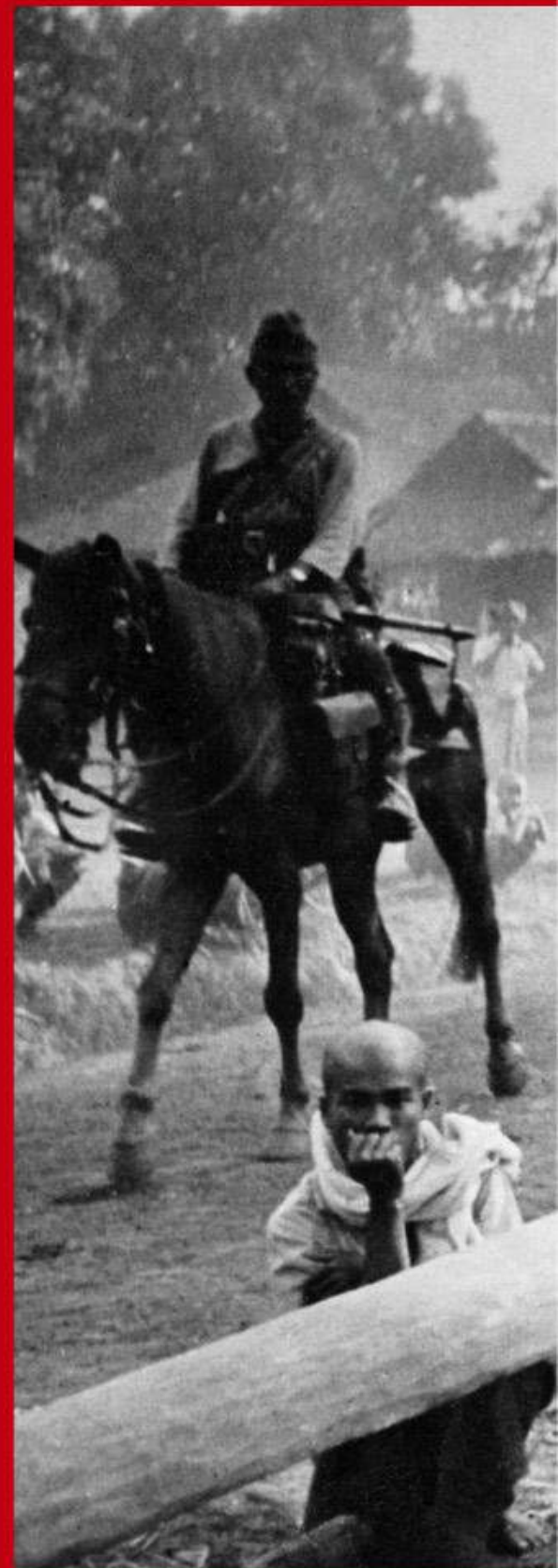


15 FEBRUARY 1942

Singapore surrenders

After the retreat to Singapore, General Percival tries to rally his forces but his men are badly dispirited, and commanders argue about how to defend the island. On the night of 8 February, Japanese forces cross the Johor Straits and Australian defenders are unable to repel them. A counter-attack fails, and the Japanese continue their advance. Water supplies are captured, and bombs rain down on the city. Fearing a massacre, Percival capitulates. Some 100,000 imperial troops surrender to a Japanese force numbering just 23,000. It is a humiliating disaster for the already beleaguered Churchill.

Japanese troops advance through Burma in 1942



they looked as “gaunt and ragged as scarecrows”, according to their commander, General Slim. It was called the “longest retreat” in British history, and it left the Japanese at the gates of India.

When a Japanese naval task force of five carriers and four battleships sailed into the Bay of Bengal at the start of April, panic ensued. In three days, 23 merchant ships sailing between Madras (now Chennai) and Calcutta (Kolkata) were sunk. Many began to fear that an invasion of India was imminent. An Eastern Fleet was hastily assembled but it was no match for the Japanese navy and their dive bombers, known as “Vals”. Two British heavy cruisers were sunk off Colombo in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and a light carrier and a destroyer went down outside Trincomalee. All of the ships were lacking effective fighter cover. The admirals seemed to have learned nothing since the loss of HMS *Repulse* and



For a brief period in 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps emerged as a credible alternative to Churchill

the *Prince of Wales* four months before— sunk by Japanese bombers in the South China Sea with the loss of hundreds of lives.

Churchill was plunged further into despair by the devastation inflicted by the “Vals”. When RAF bombers failed to score any hits on the German battleship *Tirpitz*, lying up in a Norwegian fjord, he sent an angry note asking for an explanation of “how it was that 12 of our machines managed to get no hits as compared with the extraordinary efficiency of the Japanese [air] attacks?”

Under siege

Back in the Mediterranean, the island of Malta was under intense siege. In the early months of 1942 the British naval base was put out of action, and the cruiser squadron and submarine flotilla based there withdrew. Continuous air raids – sometimes more than a dozen in a day – devastated the island’s

JANUARY TO MAY 1942

Britain retreats from Burma

Japanese troops invade Burma (now Myanmar) in mid-January, once more outflanking defenders poorly trained in jungle warfare. After a disastrous defeat on the Sittaung river in February, Rangoon (Yangon) surrenders early the following month. Without air cover, Allied troops fall back. The Japanese cut the overland route to China, moving forward to the Irrawaddy (Ayeyarwady) and Chindwin rivers. In May, as the Japanese approach India, the remaining British, Indian and Gurkha troops in Burma withdraw over the mountains in the longest retreat in British history.



A statue of Queen Victoria surveys the bombed wreckage of Valletta, Malta in 1942

SPRING 1942

Malta is under siege

In the spring of 1942, Malta becomes the most bombed place on Earth. The Royal Navy withdraws from its naval base on the island, and repeated air raids almost close down the three RAF airfields. Valletta is heavily bombed, with civilians taking shelter in caves. At least 6,400 tonnes of bombs are dropped in March and April alone. Convoys struggle to get through with vital supplies. At the worst point, commanders calculate they might be able to hold on for just 10 weeks before having to capitulate.

three RAF airfields. The city of Valletta was pulverised, its narrow streets reduced to rubble, and many of the island's architectural jewels were destroyed. One convoy bringing supplies had to turn back. Three vessels of another convoy finally got through, carrying vital supplies of food, ammunition and fuel. But as Maltese dockers unloaded these ships, the Luftwaffe attacked again – and within 72 hours all three vessels had been sunk, with most of their precious cargo lost.

Supplies did, however, continue to reach the Eighth Army, which was contesting the see-saw desert war fought up and down the Libyan coastline. A huge base was built up around Gazala and Tobruk, with vast amounts of fuel, rations and ammunition. Infantry units were brought up to strength, and armoured brigades were re-equipped with new tanks including American Grants. In Cairo, General Claude Auchinleck waited

The “longest retreat” in British history, from Burma (Myanmar), left the Japanese at the gates of India

for supplies to arrive but his foe, German general Erwin Rommel, was less patient. On 26 May, he launched an offensive at Gazala. At first it faltered, and there was an opportunity for a counter-stroke that could have smashed the German and Italian forces. But Eighth Army commander General Neil Ritchie hesitated and, by the time he attacked, Rommel had reorganised his position. By 8 June, 220 British tanks had been knocked out, including many of the Grants. Churchill cabled Auchinleck from London: “Retreat would be fatal. This is a business not only of armour but of willpower.”

Sadly, the necessary willpower was lacking. Ritchie led a retreat to the Egyptian border but ordered Tobruk, well supplied and garrisoned, to hold out, as it had done the previous year. Rommel had a different idea. On Saturday 20 June, he launched an assault on the garrison. Following a shattering

Churchill in 1942

21 JUNE 1942

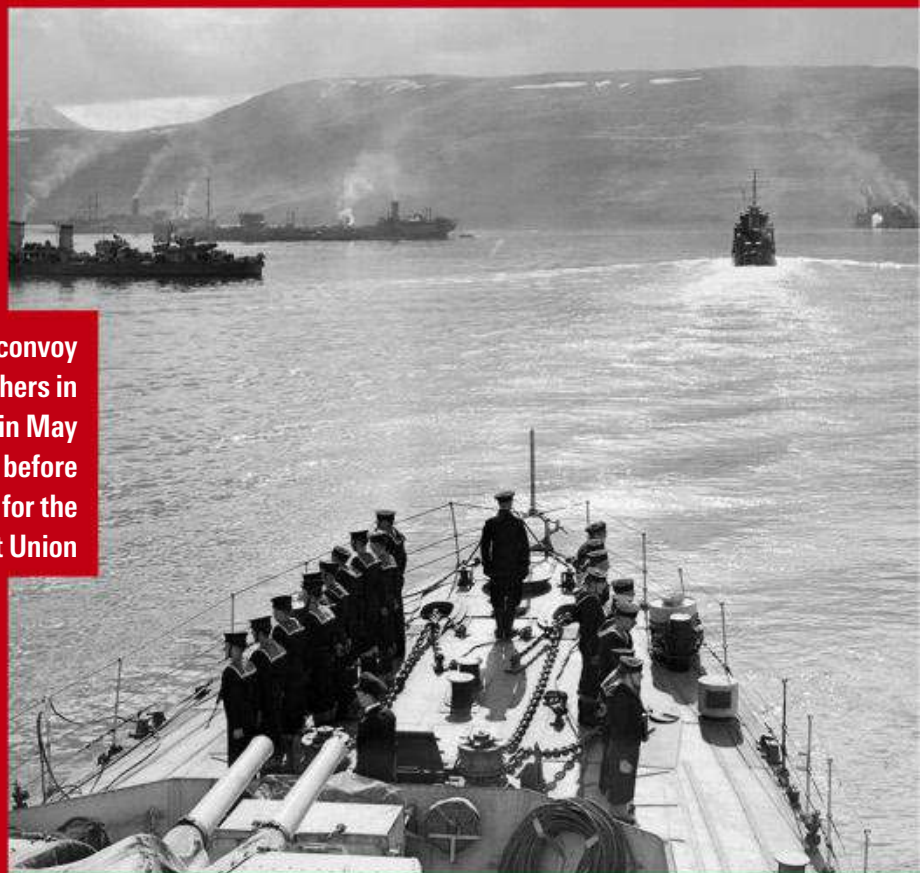
Tobruk surrenders in “disgrace”

After defeat at the battle of Gazala in mid-June, British General Neil Ritchie orders the Eighth Army to retreat towards Egypt, leaving a garrison in Tobruk. German General Erwin Rommel reorganises his troops and, on 20 June, launches an assault. The Allied garrison has 35,000 men, well over 2 million litres of petrol and a vast arsenal of ammunition, but the defenders' morale is low. After two days of fighting, South African general Hendrik Klopper orders a surrender. Tobruk had held out for eight months in 1941. In 1942, the city falls to Rommel in a weekend – a capitulation Churchill laments as a “disgrace”.



German general Erwin Rommel questions British officers after the fall of Tobruk

Allied convoy PQ17 gathers in Iceland in May 1942 before setting sail for the Soviet Union



4 JULY 1942

An Arctic imbroglio

After Hitler's massive invasion of the Soviet Union, Stalin asks Churchill to open a second front with an invasion of western Europe. Instead, Britain and the US agree to send supplies to help the Soviet Union. Arctic convoys navigating around Norway's northernmost shores begin sailing to Soviet ports in October 1941. Coming under relentless naval and air attacks in ferocious seas, losses mount.

On 4 July, fearing that the German battleship *Tirpitz* is about to attack convoy PQ17, the Admiralty orders naval vessels to abandon the convoy, and the merchant ships to scatter. The result is a disaster. Twenty-three ships are sunk, with only 10 getting through. Stalin accuses the Royal Navy of cowardice.

air raid, his engineers advanced to clear mines for his panzers. By afternoon, they had reached the harbour. The following day, the British surrendered. In 1941, Tobruk had held out defiantly for eight months. In June 1942, it collapsed in just one weekend.

Churchill was at the White House with President Roosevelt when the news came through. Some 33,000 British-led troops had surrendered to an Axis force of perhaps half that size. Churchill was shattered. “This was one of the heaviest blows I can recall during the war,” he later wrote, adding: “Defeat is one thing. Disgrace is another.”

Summer of discontent

Across the country, faith in Churchill's leadership was crumbling. Mass Observation reported that July was “a month of discontent and disappointment”, recording a 55-year-old man as saying that: “We've made a balls of it

A friend of Churchill opined that: “If we are beaten in this battle, it's the end of Winston”

everywhere.” A middle-class woman keeping a diary for Mass Observation in Hampshire recorded a neighbour saying that “she thought we would be under German rule here before too long”. Another friend “pleaded guilty to having lost faith in Churchill”.

The military debacles created a major political crisis for the prime minister and his government. One MP picked up “an atmosphere of disappointment, bewildered rage and uneasiness” in the house. A vote of no confidence was put down. The Labour MP Aneurin Bevan summed up the mood of many with a memorable aphorism: “The prime minister wins debate after debate and loses battle after battle. The country is beginning to say that he fights debates like a war and the war like a debate.” Despite the rhetoric, Churchill easily defeated the no confidence vote.

However, a credible alternative leader had



A field gun bombards German tanks during the second battle of El Alamein, an Allied victory that turned the tide of the war in the desert

**23 OCTOBER TO
4 NOVEMBER 1942**

Redemption in the desert

Rommel drives the Eighth Army back to El Alamein, 60 miles from Alexandria, where they stand firm. In August, General Bernard Montgomery is given the command and soon revives his men's morale, building up the army until his troops outnumber Axis forces by roughly two to one. He finally launches an offensive with a huge barrage on 23 October. For several days of heavy fighting the outcome is unclear; then, on 3 November, British tanks break out into open country and Rommel is driven to full retreat. Churchill's political reputation is saved.

emerged. Sir Stafford Cripps was an austere figure and an able communicator who captured the mood of the nation at this point of the war. Moreover, having been ambassador in Moscow until the beginning of the year, he cleverly associated himself with heroic Soviet resistance to the German invader, in contrast to repeated British failures. Mass Observation recorded that he was seen as "the first alternative leader-figure since the fall of Chamberlain".

With a new offensive due in Egypt, Churchill desperately needed a military victory. Brendan Bracken, a close friend and supporter, said to a colleague: "If we are beaten in this battle, it's the end of Winston."

After a tense few months, though, Churchill finally got what he needed. In early November, Montgomery's Eighth Army smashed the Axis forces at Alamein. Four days later, in a campaign dubbed Operation

Torch, US troops landed in French North Africa (in what's now Morocco and Algeria). The fighting in the desert was a long way from being over but victory looked increasingly certain. Churchill's standing quickly revived, and by mid-December a Gallup poll recorded that satisfaction with Churchill's leadership had been fully restored.

It was an upbeat end to an awful 12 months. 1940 is usually viewed as Churchill's most difficult year as prime minister, marked by the fall of France, the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, but in fact it proved to be his "finest hour". It's often imagined that from that point he enjoyed plain sailing along the long, slow route to victory in 1945. But that was not the case. Churchill's blackest hour came in 1942.

When, in 1950, he dictated his memoir-history for this period of the war, he described the long run of disasters in 1942 as

"galling links in a chain of misfortune and frustration to which no parallel could be found in our history". He reflected that, if he had been dismissed during the year of military disasters, he would then "have vanished from the scene with a load of calamity on my shoulders". But Churchill survived. Military victory brought a revival of his political fortunes. As he later wrote: "Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat." **H**

Taylor Downing is a writer, historian and broadcaster. His latest book is *1942: Britain at the Brink* (Little, Brown, 2022). Listen to him discuss 1942 on our podcast: [HistoryExtra.com/podcast](https://www.historyextra.com/podcast)

LISTEN BBC World Service's **Witness History** chronicled the fall of Singapore in 1942. Listen at: bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p00dgp8n





THE PEOPLE'S

Charles I was dead, Oliver Cromwell was on the rise, and a nation was grappling with a strange new reality – one without a monarchy. **Anna Keay** tells the story of the 1650s, through the eyes of three of the people who helped shape Britain's republican decade



The experiences of Cheshire lawyer and regicide John Bradshaw (far left), the eminent scientist William Petty (centre) and the staunch royalist Charlotte Stanley, Countess of Derby (far right) offer very different perspectives of life in the 1650s. They are flanked by both sides of the Great Seal of the Commonwealth of England, showing a meeting of parliament and the Commonwealth's coat of arms

REPUBLIC OF BRITAIN

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY



Britain's republican decade

On 5 March 1650, early in the life of the new Commonwealth of England, a state funeral was held. There was a stellar turn-out for Roland Wilson, army officer and politician. Almost the whole of the new political establishment was there: the head of the victorious New Model Army, Lord Fairfax; the lord mayor of London; and a host of MPs who had just taken up executive authority in the young republic.

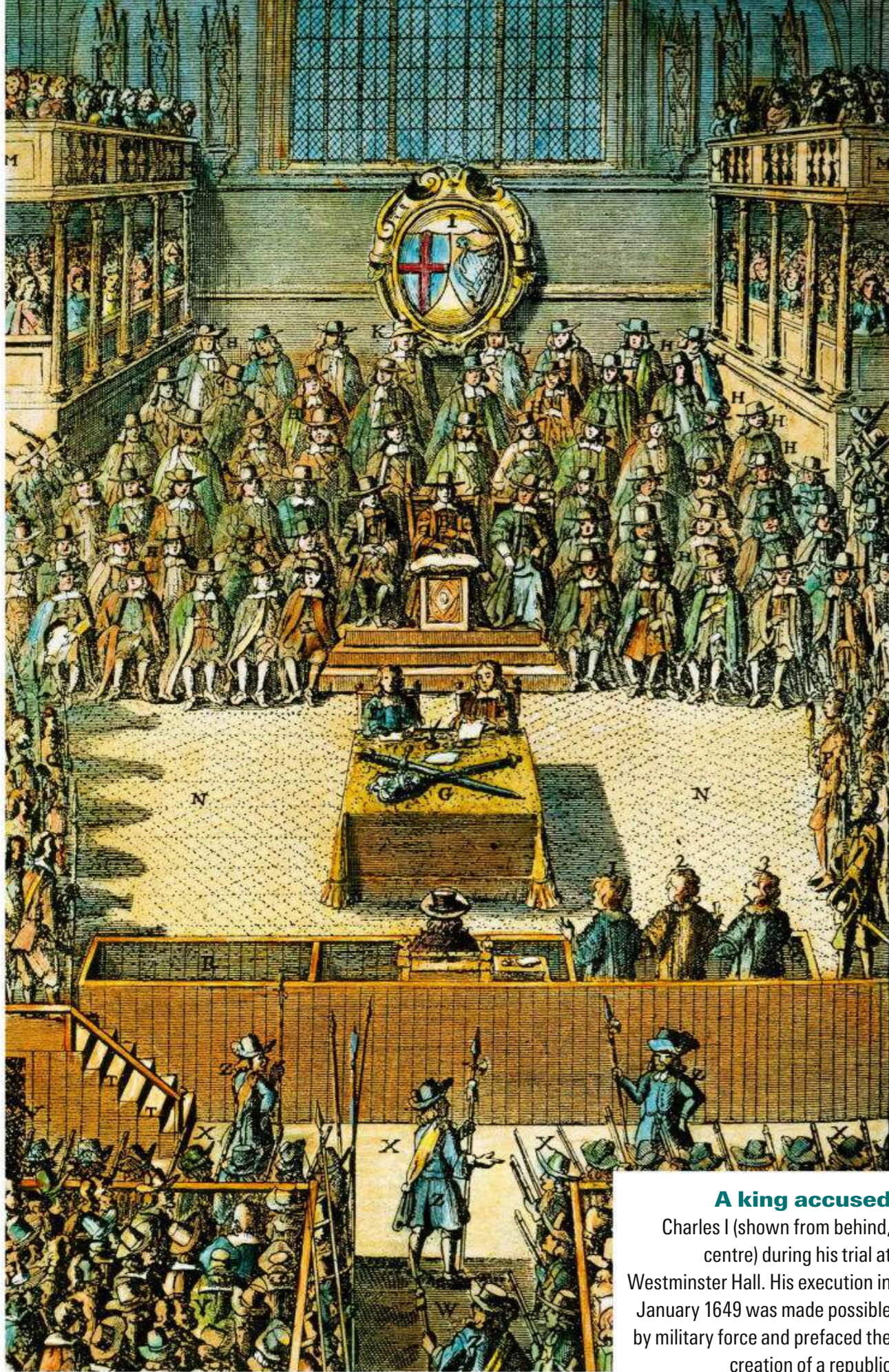
As the cavalcade swayed solemnly through the city streets, the crowds built. The mood was subdued at first, until one of the “rabble” spotted in the midst of the politicians and soldiers the 46-year-old Cheshire lawyer John Bradshaw, who had presided at the trial of Charles I in January 1649. They cried aloud: “Here is the rogue that judged the king, kill him, kill him. Let us tear him in pieces.” Bradshaw was petrified as they clamoured towards him, brandishing sticks and clubs. He clutched the arm of the lawyer who walked beside him, begging him not to abandon him, before darting down a narrow side street to give the murderous mob the slip.

It was little wonder the crowd was angry. The nation had divided during the years of civil war, with some backing Charles I and others the parliamentary leaders who challenged his policies. Yet the fight had never been about monarchy versus republicanism and both sides claimed to be fighting in the king's name. It was only once the parliamentarians had won, and a radical cabal backed by the army imprisoned many MPs, that Charles I had been tried and executed.

The experience of seeing Congleton in Cheshire, the town of which he had been mayor, destroyed by disease in 1641 had been instrumental in Bradshaw's journey to becoming a regicide. His careful plague preparations had proved utterly inadequate and citizens died in their hundreds: gravediggers were paid danger money to bury the piles of corpses and, with the economic life of the town close to collapse, starvation stalked the survivors. Bradshaw came away convinced that this was God's punishment of England for having lost its way, and that it was now his solemn duty to serve justice on “a king more cruel than Nero”.

Holding a dream

The Commonwealth or Republic of England was declared in 1649 – shortly after Charles I's execution – and for four years the republican dream of a country without a king or head of state, in which the people as represented in parliament were sovereign, held. In an extraordinary feat of political and



A king accused

Charles I (shown from behind, centre) during his trial at Westminster Hall. His execution in January 1649 was made possible by military force and prefaced the creation of a republic

administrative engineering the country was restructured along these new egalitarian lines. The House of Lords was abolished, the Church of England was already in the process of being radically reformed, minus bishops, and the vast royal estates and collections were put up for sale.

Bradshaw would himself play a key role in the nascent Commonwealth, assuming the presidency of the new Council of State – which acted as the executive of the government in place of the king and the Privy Council – and for three years labouring to make a success of the republic he had helped to sire.

Uppermost in the mind of the council was preventing a royalist counter-attack. The revolution had been condemned in both Scotland and Ireland, and forcing each nation

into submission would occupy much of the energy of the new republic. After bloody campaigns in these two lands, the Isle of Man was almost the last Stuart outpost of the British Isles.

Here in 1651, standing alone, was the second of our three protagonists: Charlotte Stanley, Countess of Derby, the French granddaughter of William the Silent who had led the Dutch in their war of independence. She watched and waited from the confines of Castle Rushen, a portrait miniature of Charles II in the folds of her skirt.

Charlotte's husband had sailed to join the young Charles's military campaign to restore the monarchy, but the royalists had been wiped out on the floodplain outside Worcester, and Derby and the king were now



Famous last stand

The Countess of Derby stood firm on the Isle of Man, one of the last Stuart outposts in Britain, before her betrayal by a Manx politician

both fugitives on the run.

A war-weary people had not responded to Charles II's call to rise, reluctant to reignite the conflict and suspicious of the unruly Highlanders who marched with him. Charlotte had already directed one long siege and was poised to mount another. But the Manxmen and women did not share her resolve. Charlotte stood imperious, declaring of her enemies: "My goods and house shall burn in his sight, myselfe, children and souldiers, rather then fall into his hands." Yet, all the while, the Manx politician William Christian was cutting a secret deal with the republic and a massive army was allowed to land.

The Countess of Derby was betrayed. In a final act of defiance she put her name to the terms of surrender without reading a single word. In the years that followed, Charlotte devoted herself not to securing a royalist restoration but to salvaging her own family's position. She managed to assemble the means to pay the fines that retrieved her confiscated lands. Once these had been paid, the appeal of pushing for further regime-change dulled.

The House of Lords was abolished, the Church of England was being reformed, and royal estates were put up for sale

TIMELINE

Three kingdoms without a king

1649 As civil war rages, **King Charles I is tried and executed**. The monarchy is abolished and a Commonwealth, or **Republic of England**, declared.

1649–51 An English army led by Oliver Cromwell **subjugates Ireland and Scotland**.

A boot worn by a **Captain Lench**, who fought at Worcester

1651 Cromwell's forces **defeat Charles II at the battle of Worcester**. Charles evades his pursuers by hiding in an oak tree, and **escapes to France**.



1653 The Commonwealth is abolished and a Protectorate declared. This is stewarded by a "**Lord Protector**", **Oliver Cromwell** (shown left).



1654–58 Cromwell's administration in Ireland undertakes a **mass dispossession of Irish landowners** and redistributes the land to the funders and fighters of the English army.

1655 English forces wrest the island of **Jamaica** from Spain and establish a colony.

1656 A **political union** between England and Scotland is effected; Scotland and Ireland send MPs to Westminster

1658 **Oliver Cromwell dies** and is succeeded by his son **Richard** as Lord Protector.

1659 The **Protectorate collapses** and the army seizes control, shutting down parliament.

1659 **George Monck** (right), head of the army in Scotland, declares for parliament and marches on London.



1660 Monck concludes that the only viable option is the restoration of the monarchy. **Charles II returns from his exile in the Netherlands**, arriving in London on 29 May, his 30th birthday.

A coin minted in 1661 shows King Charles II in his coronation robes





Taking the reins

Oliver Cromwell was declared Lord Protector in 1653, so ending a four-year period without a head of state

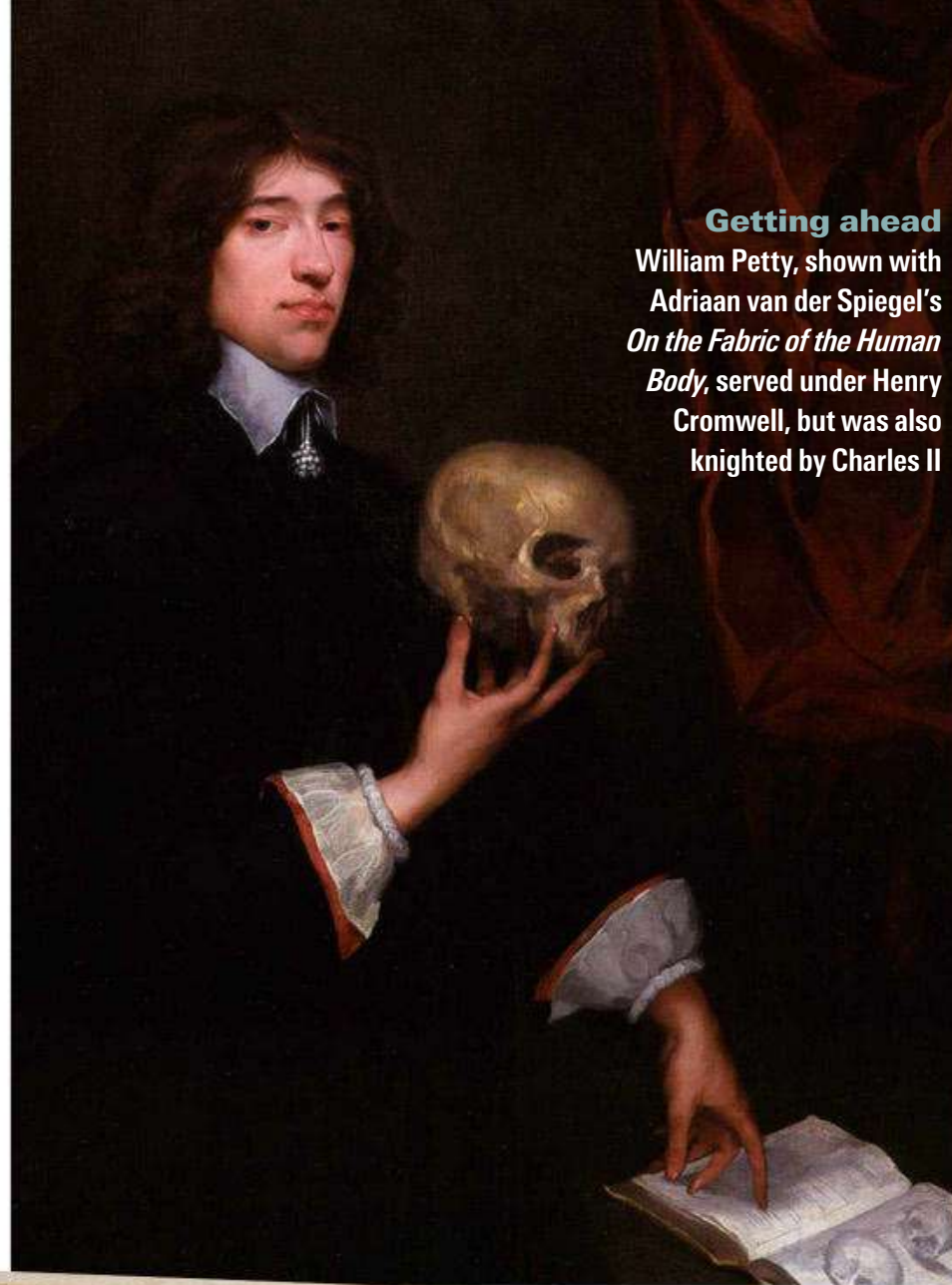
The fall of the Isle of Man, and complete command of Britain and Ireland that followed, took the pressure off the Commonwealth government long enough for the contradictions on which it was built to be exposed. The army wanted radical reform, MPs wanted moderation. The head of the army, General Oliver Cromwell, and his men finally lost patience and marched MPs from their chamber, famously declaring “they had sat long enough” for all the good they had done. Within a year, the Commonwealth of England, Ireland and Scotland was gone and instead a new “Protectorate” was born, a kingless state stewarded by a powerful “Lord Protector”, Cromwell himself

Going to market

John Bradshaw lamented some years into the republic that, despite all their efforts, he doubted he and his comrades had changed a single royalist’s mind. One of his colleagues remarked that it didn’t matter as most “people care not what government they live under, so [long] as they may plough and go to market”. It was true that the majority had backed neither side in the wars but wished simply to keep their heads down and make a living.

One who had no particular political allegiance was our third protagonist, Dr William Petty, a precocious young scientist sent to Ireland in 1652 as physician to the Commonwealth Army. The republic’s bloody campaign there, which Cromwell himself had

Bradshaw lamented that, despite all their efforts, he doubted he and his comrades had changed a single royalist’s mind



Getting ahead

William Petty, shown with Adriaan van der Spiegel’s *On the Fabric of the Human Body*, served under Henry Cromwell, but was also knighted by Charles II



Spoils of war

Petty’s map of Ireland, charted in the 1650s, was a logistical triumph, but it facilitated the confiscation of vast swathes of land from Irish Catholics

The decade that forged modern Britain

The 1650s fostered a national media, the scientific revolution and international expansionism

The republicanism of the 1650s may have been extinguished by the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, but the effects of those years would endure. It was precisely through the disruption, disagreement and dissent that many components of modern Britain were forged. The strong hand of the monarchy and the state-sponsored church had long helped control beliefs and ideas – political, social and religious – but as Britain descended into war and new systems emerged, that control shattered.

The war had been sparked by disputes about religion; as the floodgates to religious difference were opened a remarkable range of **religious sects and societies** came into view: Fifth Monarchists and Seekers, Baptists and Quakers. The English censorship regime, whereby any printed publication had to be licensed by the Stationers' Company, broke down in the 1640s, as the number of printed works increased from hundreds to thousands per



The polymaths William Brouncker (left) and Francis Bacon flank a bust of Charles II, in a 1667 etching. They are surrounded by symbols of scientific learning representing the Royal Society, founded in 1660

year. **Newspapers**, unknown in Britain at the beginning of the century, became commonplace, with ploughmen and innkeepers, as well as the professional classes, reading daily news of domestic and foreign affairs. Literacy leapt up and men and women who had never left their locality were suddenly alive to national and international affairs.

The need to sign an oath of allegiance to the new republic cleared out the senior ranks of numerous institutions. At royalist Oxford the exodus was widespread and **young scientists** like William Petty found themselves suddenly promoted. In 1649 the Oxford Experimental Philosophy Club was born, and (renaming itself the Royal Society at the Restoration) would be at the forefront of a **scientific revolution**.

The military force necessary to wage war, and to keep control once it had been won, brought with it a significant **expansion in the size of the state**. A standing army of thousands, and a navy strong enough to shore up a revolutionary regime, meant higher taxes and more men and administrative machinery.

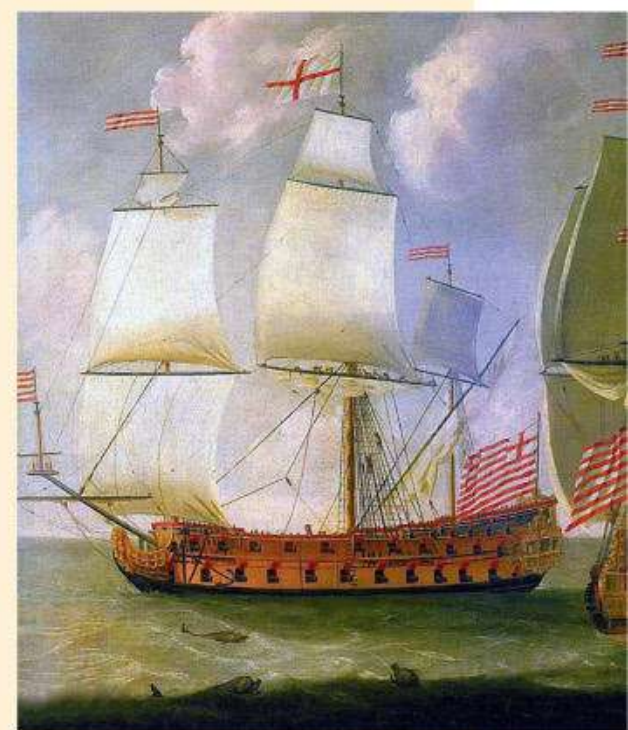
The need to control the British Isles, to see off challenges to the new regime, forced a deeper integration than had ever been attempted. **Scotland and Ireland** were both conquered by the English republican army. Ireland was subjected to a wholesale redistribution of land that would disenfranchise its Catholic population almost entirely, and Scotland bound together with England in a parliamentary union that would be the direct forerunner of the Act of Union of 1707.

In many ways it was the Restoration of 1660, rather than the Commonwealth years of the 1650s, that was the aberration. In the 1650s were sewn the seeds of the future: freedom of the press, freedom of worship, naval and military strength, scientific endeavour and a belief in parliamentary supremacy.

The crucial further ingredient was **internationalism**. In the 1650s the East India Company was granted a new charter and the British state embarked upon its first proper trans-oceanic colonial mission, establishing a colony in Jamaica. Just as that island had not been the original goal, so the consequences would be unexpected. But as British endeavours overseas prospered, and African people were forcibly transported across the Atlantic to work the sun-baked fields of the Caribbean, so began the **international expansionism** that would dominate the relationship between Britain and the world for centuries to come.



An engraving shows a meeting of Quakers. Nonconformism flourished in the 17th century



East India Company ships, c1685. The renewal of the company's charter in 1657 set Britain on course to becoming a global nation

John Bradshaw's corpse was exhumed and his decaying toes snapped off and sold as souvenirs

led, was now over. Hundreds of thousands had died to bring the island under the control of the Puritan English government.

The bodies may have been buried but the financial cost had yet to be paid. In a fateful formulation that dated to Charles I's time, both the funders and the fighters of the English army were to be rewarded in lands confiscated from the vanquished Irish. Until this could be achieved, the army could not be disbanded and the immense costs would continue to mount.

The crucial stumbling block was the lack of information, for accurate maps did not then exist for most of Ireland. A group of professional surveyors had been tasked with remedying this. As they bustled in and out of meetings at Dublin Castle, William Petty looked on in disbelief. The task was clearly going to take them most of a decade, the costs would be astronomical and the results unreliable.

Petty felt compelled to intervene. He put it to his master, the Protector's second-oldest surviving son, Henry Cromwell, that he should be given the job instead. He would sack the surveyors and use the underemployed soldiers in their place. Training them to undertake each aspect of the cartographical process, he would create far more accurate maps, produce them for a much lower cost and undertake the whole exercise in just one year. So it was that the most ambitious mapping project in the history of Britain and Ireland was launched.

Petty would confound his many sceptics to complete the task in 13 months. "The Down Survey" set new standards in mapping and in the management of men and projects – and it provided the basis for an epic redistribution of land. Before 1640 about two-thirds of Ireland had been owned by Irish men and women, most of whom were Catholics. By 1660, thanks to the programme of confiscations, three-quarters of Ireland was in the hands of Protestants from mainland Britain. There it would remain. The disenfranchisement of the



Return of the king Charles II's coronation portrait, 1661. With the Protectorate collapsed and the army in control, the monarchy's restoration was rapidly viewed as the only way out of the impasse

Irish had been effected, and the consequences would reverberate down the centuries.

The wrong brother

The Protectorate was always a precarious construct, too radical for the moderates, too moderate for the radicals. Oliver Cromwell died in 1658. Had Henry Cromwell (an experienced politician and soldier with real strength of character) been named as his father's successor the regime might just have endured, but in the hands of his less capable, older brother, Richard, it was doomed. Within nine months the Protectorate had collapsed, and the army had once again seized control. It was only after exhausting every other alternative that the head of the army in Scotland, George Monck, concluded that the monarchy must be restored.

John Bradshaw's state funeral was the last great occasion of the republican era. A year later his decaying corpse was exhumed from Westminster Abbey, and hanged, drawn and quartered before a baying crowd at Tyburn. Apprentices snapped off his decaying toes and traded them as souvenirs.

Charlotte, Dowager Countess of Derby attended Charles II's coronation, but considered the new king too quick to forgive. In direct violation of the amnesty that had been declared, her Manx betrayer, William

Christian, was convicted of treason and shot dead. When William Petty was introduced to the new king, he stammered out an apology for having worked for the Cromwells. But Charles II waved away his explanations, eager to know more about Petty's designs for a double-hulled boat. A new age had dawned.

The decade of revolution and republicanism in Britain and Ireland was short but seismic. As Dickens would write of revolutionary France, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times... it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." Through the lives of those who experienced it, something much more interesting than who was "right" and who was "wrong" is revealed: how these lands fared and were formed in the flames of revolution. **H**

Anna Keay is a historian of the 17th century and director of the Landmark Trust. Her latest book is *The Restless Republic: Britain Without a Crown* (William Collins, 2022). Anna will be discussing the 1650s on our podcast: historyextra.com/podcast

LISTEN

To listen to Melvyn Bragg and guests investigate the Interregnum on BBC Radio 4's *In Our Time*, go to bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000wcn

BBC
RADIO

4

ALAMY



**Drivers
of change**

A 1960s bus on display at M Shed museum in Bristol. Neil MacGregor praises the exhibit for reflecting a period of protest and reform in the city

// We decide for ourselves who we think we are – and museums are central to that //



In his new BBC Radio 4 series, curator and broadcaster **Neil MacGregor** explores the changing role of Britain's museums. He explains to Matt Elton why these venues are more vital now than ever



Matt Elton What ideas about museums did you aim to probe with this new series?

Neil MacGregor We wanted to explore the civic role of Britain's museums by looking at 20 institutions across the whole of the UK outside London. How are they rethinking their purpose in the community? How are they using their objects to engage with visitors in new ways? It seems to me that museums everywhere are looking again at their history, their collections and their visitors, and thinking about them afresh.

We asked the staff of each museum to pick a single object – but, rather than choosing their greatest treasure, we wanted them to discuss an object that sums up the way in which the museum addresses a particular question or community.

We also talked to members of the public about what each object means to them, and the ways in which the museum is helping the community to reshape its future. What emerges is a fascinating overview of the kinds of questions that different regions and cities want to address, and the objects museums are using to offer answers.

At the time that we're speaking, you're about halfway through making the series. Which places or objects you've encountered so far best illustrate these themes?

Yes, we have been working our way slowly north. In Northern Ireland, we covered a particularly telling example: the Ulster

Museum [part of National Museums NI] in Belfast. That's obviously a museum for which the question of national identity is extremely important. What does it mean to be Northern Irish, to be a citizen of Northern Ireland?

The history of the Troubles means that Northern Ireland has a shared past, but it doesn't have a shared memory: different communities remember and understand its history differently. So the museum's staff wanted to choose an artefact that would indicate – or even create – a shared memory. Very brilliantly, they chose an object from the Channel 4 series *Derry Girls* – a hilarious comedy about a group of four young girls from a Catholic school in Northern Ireland.

They chose a moment [in an episode from the second season] in which the characters go on a community-building weekend with boys from a Protestant school. They're tasked with writing down on one blackboard the differences between the two communities and, on another, the things that they share. The great joke at the end, of course, is that the blackboard of similarities is completely empty, while the blackboard of differences is absolutely covered with points – many of them absolutely ridiculous things about the ways in which Protestants and Catholics think about each other.

It was one of the standout moments of the series, and a re-creation of the blackboard is now in the permanent collection in the Ulster Museum, where it's much visited by school groups. It's an object that reflects the shared memory of the central question of Northern Irish identity, as well as the role of dialogue and conversation. In parallel with the museum's exhibition on the Troubles, it's also a remarkable statement: that not only can we actually start talking about the causes of the Troubles, but also that we're now perhaps almost in a position to share a joke about them.

That object is exactly the kind of thing we wanted to explore. It's an example of a museum using an object to address a particular issue, and to engage powerfully with civic debate. Everyone we spoke to in the local community pointed out that the museum has always been a neutral space that belonged equally to all communities.

Why do you think museums around the UK are having to rethink their role?

I think it's an awareness that, in many parts of the UK, museums now represent the only

part of the public realm in which people can have difficult, serious conversations. They allow citizens to discuss big questions on equal terms, and to put those questions into the longer sweep of history.

But museums have also been under increasing pressure recently to prove why they should continue to exist. There's been – very proper – public debate over the past few years about which public services we actually need, and museums have stepped up and demonstrated why they are vital for a healthy society to grow and flourish.

Do you think these factors have changed the relationship between museums and the local community?

For a long time, museums were thought of as places in which we explored and understood the past. That's still true, of course. But what's been added to that is an increasing understanding that how we view the past is also a mirror of our current concerns, and an indication of what we could be in the future. That expansion – to include a consideration of the ways in which the past helps us to rethink our future – has, I think, been a big change for museums.

Does this mean that museums must now say something about our identity in the present moment?

Museums have always done that – and, indeed, so has history more generally. But part of the thinking behind this new series was the wider conversation that's taking place at the moment about history. Why is it important that each generation re-examines history, and that our understanding of history continually changes? Recent debates about what statues [of controversial historical figures] say about our history are a key example of this.

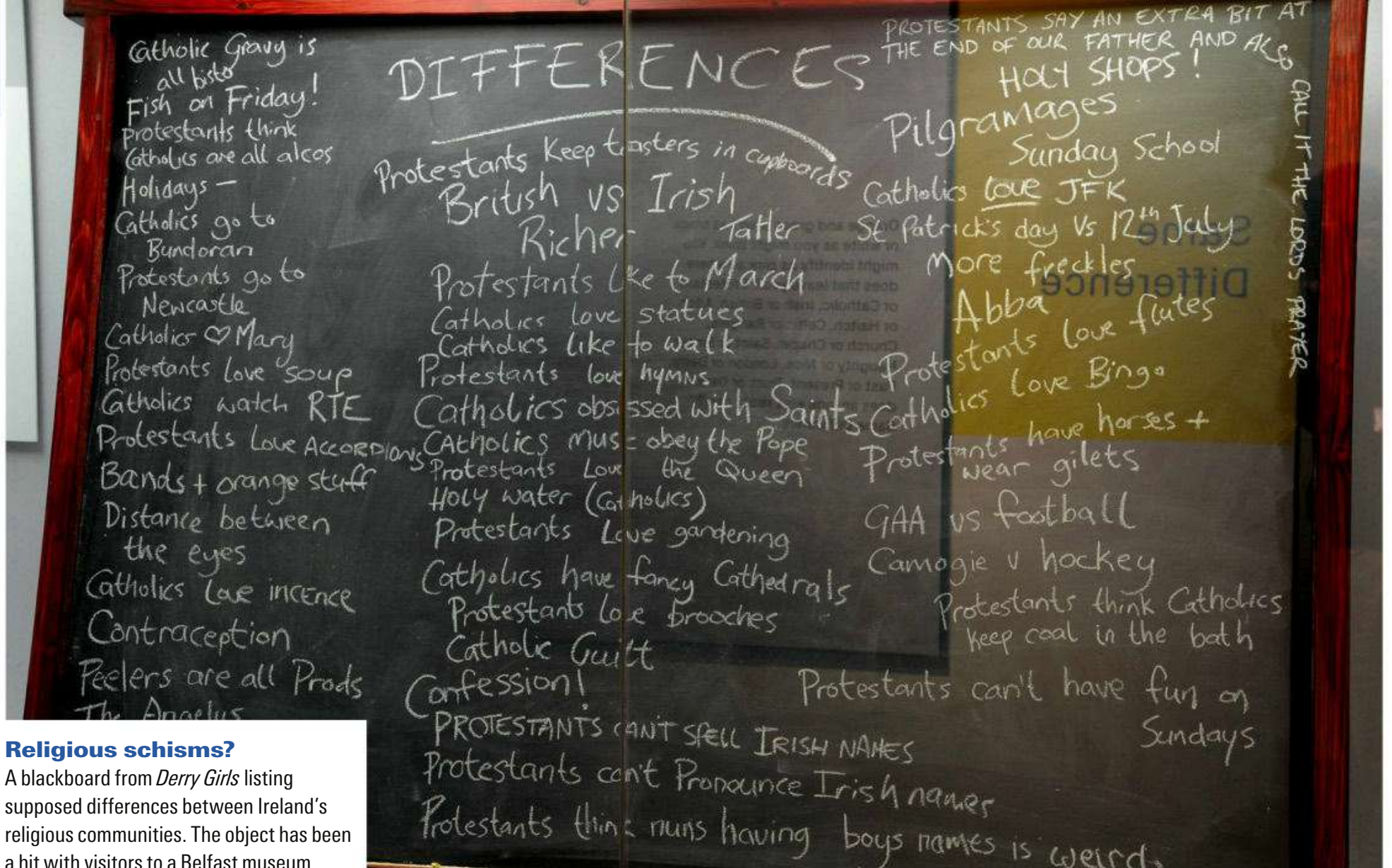
We wanted to explore how a range of museums are revisiting history, and the historical episodes they think need to be re-examined and re-evaluated as a result of who we are as a society in this moment. One of the questions we tackle is about national identity, for instance, and – returning to that object in Belfast – the ways in which national museums in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland reflect those identities.

Do you think that the role of national museums has changed in recent years?

One of the biggest questions in the UK across the past 30 years has been how the



Maintaining standards A flag from the battle of Culloden, on display at the National Museum of Scotland. Museums telling the stories of entire nations are more vital now than ever, says MacGregor



Religious schisms?

A blackboard from *Derry Girls* listing supposed differences between Ireland's religious communities. The object has been a hit with visitors to a Belfast museum

idea of the four nations should be articulated, re-articulated, and redefined. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the issue of their relationship to England and to each other has been right at the top of the political agenda. And where is that question of what it means to be Scottish today, or Welsh today, better explored – and more neutrally explored – than in a national museum? I think they have a huge role at the moment – perhaps, in many ways, a more vital role than they have had at any point in the past 50 or 60 years.

Have museums also had to adapt as the people they serve change?

As populations change, so the stories from the past on which a museum focuses also have to change. A good example of this kind of shift is in Bristol, where the population has changed markedly across the past 60 years as a result of immigration. Its museums now need to include the stories of people who have arrived since the Second World War.

I expected the curators of Bristol's M Shed museum to choose the statue of Edward Colston [toppled by demonstrators in 2020] because that's what we immediately think about at the moment when we hear about Bristol – particularly given that the statue is now in that museum. In fact, they did something very different: they decided to place the story of racial tension and the legacy of empire into a broader, longer narrative. So they selected a bus (see page 35) that illustrates the story of a boycott in the city in the early 1960s.

At that time, local trade unions refused to let Caribbean and Asian immigrants work on the buses. In protest, some of those people – particularly those from the Caribbean community – launched a boycott of the city's buses, which eventually led to a complete change of the regulations. Unions and employers changed their position, and immigrants were able to join the workforce on the buses.

It's a very powerful moment in the history of modern Bristol. But it's also a moment in the history of modern Britain: it happened just before the 1965 Race Relations Act, and reminds us of the problems that people from immigrant communities faced.

// Museums have been under increasing pressure recently to prove why they should continue to exist //

Another of the themes of the series is loss and longing. What does that tell us about the role of museums, and how we view the past?

The whole series is about the ways in which museums respond to changes both in populations and the concerns of those populations. And one of the most profound changes that a community can experience is when an entire industry dies out. A museum is often a place in which you can look back at that history and, out of that sense of loss and longing, build something positive for the local community.

A good example is Penrhyn, a mock-Norman castle in north Wales. It was built in the 1820s and 1830s for the Dawkins-Pennants, a family who had made a fortune from exporting slate from the local quarry all around the world. The money allowed the family not just to build the castle but also to assemble a collection of art including works by Gainsborough, Constable and Rembrandt. That collection, and the castle itself, are now held by the National Trust – but the slate quarry, of course, is now much reduced, and the life of the community has also been much diminished as a result. There's a long history of hostility between the family that owned the castle and the workers in the quarry, whose ancestors were exploited terribly in the 19th and early 20th century.

So the National Trust decided to put the quarry workers right at the heart of their telling of the castle's history and remind visitors that it was those workers' labour that

made it all possible. The result has been an extraordinary reconciliation between the local population, the families that used to work in the quarry, and the castle – and the fostering of a real sense of shared pride in what was made. For the first time in generations, members of the quarry choir now sing in the central hall of the castle. There's no longer a sense of loss for what's gone, but an awareness that something was built that's now central to the region's economy and tourism. It's a great example of the way in which museums can, perhaps uniquely, turn a difficult past into an asset that can be built on for the future.

Are there any other particularly revealing stories or surprises you've encountered during the making of the series?

The biggest surprise for me was the Tower Museum in Derry/Londonderry. I was convinced that it would have to choose an object relating to the Troubles and those unhappy episodes from the city's history. In fact, the curators wanted to go back to an earlier period, choosing something completely different: a shirt – because the city was *the* great centre of shirt manufacture in the United Kingdom. Indeed, in the 1920s it made 40 per cent of the UK's shirts, and exported them right around the world.

Until its decline in the 1970s, the shirt factories were by far the city's largest employers, and took on people from across the religious divide. They united people in work but also, in general, created friendly memories of a period in which the city functioned as one. I'd never heard of the shirts of Londonderry, but the curators chose just such an artefact as something that brings all kinds of people into the museum – and which could also form the basis of thinking about how to develop a new textile industry in Northern Ireland. It's a great example of how the past can be transformed into a shared memory and a shared enthusiasm that can be built on for the future.

It's interesting that we've been talking so much about the need for museums to change, because there's been discomfort expressed in some political quarters recently about the idea that history is malleable and changeable rather than fixed and concrete. Do you think this says something about the political relationship with history in the present moment? I hope one of the things that comes out of this series is to make it clear that every

Working together
Penrhyn slate quarry in north Wales, as depicted in an 1832 painting. A recent retelling of the region's history has helped reframe a previously divisive past



Fabric of society

A shirt on display at the Tower Museum in Derry/Londonderry, part of its exhibition telling the story of the city's textiles heritage. Such artefacts reveal much about community memory, MacGregor argues

// Every generation has different questions about the present – so that also means they look differently at the past //

generation has to rethink and rewrite the past. Every generation has different questions about the present, so that necessarily also means that they have to look differently at the past. In other words, we have *always* had to keep rethinking who we were and how we got to where we are now.

What's very special about the British tradition of engaging with our history is that it has never been controlled by the centre. In France, to take the opposite example, the government has always decided what French history is and what is taught in every school. There is a French "official view" of history. We have never had that in our country: we have always felt that everybody has to explore history for themselves.

What's very powerful, looking at the museums we're exploring in this series, is that every local museum and every local community is deciding for itself which bits of its history need to be revisited, commented on or brought out of relative neglect and into the spotlight. That's one of the great strengths of our country, I think: that we don't have central control of who we think we are. We decide ourselves who we think we are – and museums are absolutely central to that.

That's why we chose to make this series about museums outside London. There's been great debate about the extent to which central government should be making these decisions, and we wanted to demonstrate that the tradition in Britain has never been decided at the centre of government but by the people for themselves. **H**

Neil MacGregor is a broadcaster, author and former director of the British Museum. You can hear more from this conversation on our podcast: historyextra.com/podcast. *The Museums That Make Us* is currently airing on weekdays on BBC Radio 4 and you can catch up on previous episodes at BBC Sounds



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Candle holder made by prisoners of war, from packing materials found in food parcels >



From wartime to peacetime

NOBODY KNOWS WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS BUT, WITH YOUR GENEROSITY, THE BRITISH RED CROSS CAN ENSURE IT'S ALWAYS THERE TO LEND A HAND

BY MEHZEBIN ADAM, CURATOR, BRITISH RED CROSS MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

For the last 150 years, the British Red Cross has put kindness into action, helping people from the UK and beyond when crisis strikes. Now, you can delve deep into the charity's celebrated history with its new exhibition, the Museum of Kindness, which highlights much of the British Red Cross's work over the years, including its commitment to help prisoners of war during the Second World War.

During the conflict, the British Red Cross formed the War Organisation with the Order of St John to raise funds and coordinate wartime relief activities. Indeed, supporting prisoners of war was one of the vital services provided by the organisation and included the packing and dispatching of food parcels – an act that played a crucial role in helping to keep prisoners alive, as this food supplied the nutrients that prison camp diets often lacked.

By 1944, around 2,700 people worked in the charity's food-packing centres, and astonishingly, more than 80 per cent volunteered without a salary. Their work was not in vain, however, as almost 20 million food parcels had been sent overseas by the end of the war. What's more, many prisoners used the packing materials found in the parcels, such as tins, to create other useful items, including plates and candle holders.

As well as the standard food parcels, the British Red Cross also sent medical supplies, books, games and sports equipment, while education services, set up in 1940, enabled many prisoners to earn university degrees while in captivity. The same year also saw the War Organisation allow each prisoner's next of kin to send a package every three months. These would often include prized home comforts such as knitted clothing, slippers and toothbrushes. By the end of the conflict, around one million of these special parcels had been distributed.



LEAVE A LEGACY

The work carried out by the British Red Cross is as essential today as it was during the Second World War. It's thanks to the generosity of the charity's supporters that it can always be ready to help those in crisis, whether they're on the other side of the world or in your local community.

By leaving a gift in your will, you can create a lasting legacy and ensure that the British Red Cross can continue to support vulnerable people. Will you help it be there for people in crisis?



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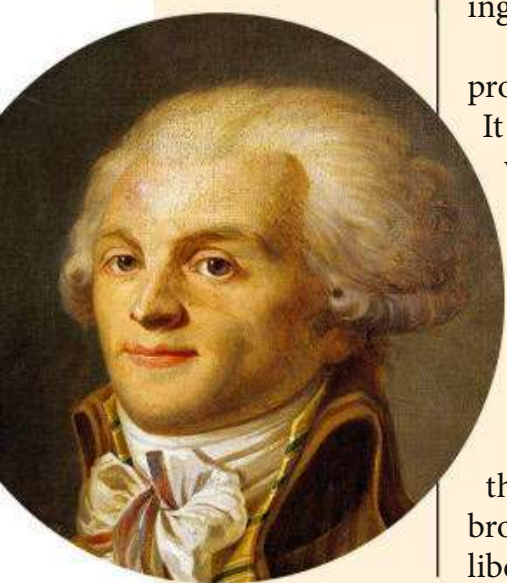
Power grab Napoleon Bonaparte leads a military coup in November 1799. The general claimed he was acting in the interests of the revolution, but subsequent events suggest otherwise

How Napoleon (almost) destroyed the French Revolution

The Corsican general proclaimed himself a defender of republican ideals – while doing all he could to dismantle them

BY **MARISA LINTON**

The leading revolutionary Maximilien Robespierre warned that war would bring a military strongman to power



“Many Jacobin sympathisers were executed during the Terror, and still more arrested. Among the latter was Napoleon Bonaparte

On 10 November 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte stormed into the chambers at the Château de Saint-Cloud in the suburbs of Paris and set in train a military coup. “The republic no longer

has a government,” he declared to the assembled members of one of France’s two ruling councils. “Together let us save the cause of liberty and equality.”

The coup represented an enormous gamble for Bonaparte but it paid off spectacularly: within a matter of days, he had been declared First Consul of his nation. Bonaparte was now the most powerful figure in France – and hardly anybody had seen it coming. But one man had, and his name was Maximilien Robespierre.

When revolutionary France had embarked on a war with its royalist neighbours in April 1792, Robespierre warned of the dangers that would follow. A military leader could, the leading Jacobin revolutionary counselled, take the opportunity to seize political power in Paris, becoming another Julius Caesar, another Oliver Cromwell.

Robespierre’s warnings were disregarded, but they proved prescient. The ensuing war would last a generation. It brought to prominence several talented young generals with the potential to become a second Caesar. In the end the man who came out ahead was the young Corsican general who burst into the Château de Saint-Cloud in November 1799: Bonaparte.

For many historians, the coup of November 1799 signalled the end of one of the great step-changes in European history: the French Revolution. Erupting in 1789, the revolution had shaken the old order based on the authority of king, nobles and clergy to its core. It also brought into being a raft of new political ideals: individual liberty, equality before the law, freedom of speech and religious toleration. The revolution was the first of its kind anywhere in the world, and would have an unfathomable impact on modern history.

But what would be the fate of these revolutionary ideals under the Napoleonic regime that took shape after his rise to power in 1799? Would the man himself go on to champion them or dismantle them? Was he their greatest ally, or an implacable foe?

If Bonaparte himself is to be believed, the answer is clear: the revolution was safe in his hands. “The French Revolution need fear nothing,” he declared, “since the throne of the Bourbons is occupied by a soldier!”

Bonaparte later presented himself as having been the mediator between the old world of the kings and the new

world of the revolution: “The [great battle] of the century had been won,” he intoned, “and the revolution accomplished.” However, a close examination of what Bonaparte *did*, as opposed to what he *said*, during his extraordinary time in power tells an entirely different story.

As a young man, Bonaparte’s revolutionary credentials were impressive. Maximilien Robespierre’s younger brother, Augustin, had encountered Bonaparte, then a young artillery officer, at the siege to retake Toulon from the British in 1793. Augustin was impressed by Bonaparte’s expertise and by his radicalism – laid out in Bonaparte’s pamphlet, *Le Souper de Beaucaire*, written in support of the Jacobins, among revolutionary France’s most powerful political forces. The Corsican was, Augustin confided to Maximilien, a man of “transcendental merit”.

Neither brother would live to see that potential realised. On 28 July 1794, both Maximilien and Augustin lost their lives to the guillotine, the latest victims of waves of revolutionary bloodletting that we now know as the Terror. Many more Jacobin sympathisers would be executed, and more still arrested. Among the latter was Bonaparte himself, who spent a short time imprisoned at the fort of Antibes in France’s south-eastern corner.

He was in prison for less than two weeks, and was released after writing a statement that emphasised his republican allegiances, while distancing himself from the Robespierre brothers and Jacobinism. Such radical politics could no longer serve Bonaparte’s ambition: ever the pragmatist, he promptly ditched them.

As Maximilien Robespierre had predicted, the French Revolution offered young soldiers of talent the opportunity to rise through the ranks. Some of these men had the potential to make the transition to the political sphere had they so wished. They included Lazare Hoche, whose father had been a servant tending the king’s horses in the stables of Versailles. Yet Hoche, seen by many as a more talented man, died young of consumption in 1797.

Another rising star was Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, son of an enslaved black woman and a French nobleman, her legal owner. More than 6ft, strikingly handsome, a staunch Republican (and father of the author of *The Three Musketeers*), Dumas cut a much more impressive figure than the diminutive Bonaparte. During the French invasion of Egypt (1798–1801), locals who saw Dumas on horseback “all believed that he was the leader of the expedition” rather than Bonaparte.

When he heard that Dumas had conferred with other generals about his ineptitude in Egypt, Bonaparte threatened to shoot him. En route back to France, Dumas was captured by royalist forces in the Kingdom of Naples, imprisoned in grim conditions, and left to languish by Bonaparte, who refused to intervene. Though Dumas was eventually released, his health was irretrievably damaged.

The fates of both Hoche and Dumas prove that, while Bonaparte was one of the most able of the new generals, he was also lucky that his main rivals had been eliminated.

Bonaparte was the leading proponent of the French invasion of Egypt. So when the campaign descended into a bloody debacle, it was he who had most to lose. Yet he showed exceptional skill in presenting it as a success, and himself as a hero. He left his soldiers bogged down in the desert sands and returned before news of the extent of the disaster had reached France. In doing so, he was able to turn a potentially career-ending fiasco into a bid for power.

After arranging for the despatch of looted treasures from Egypt's ancient past, which would eventually find their way into the Louvre, Bonaparte cut a deal with the leading political theorist of the revolution, Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès. Lured by the prospect of a regime based on militarism – and the big money to be made from lucrative contracts to supply the armies – Bonaparte and Sieyès conspired to overthrow the republic that they claimed to cherish. The result was the coup of November 1799.

Though this revolt – widely known as the Coup of 18 Brumaire, the name of its date in the short-lived French revolutionary calendar – ultimately catapulted Bonaparte into power, it very nearly went wrong. In short, Bonaparte met with more opposition than he had expected.

“What about the constitution?” declared a defiant deputy in response to the Corsican’s dramatic entrance to the Château de Saint-Cloud. According to the political commentator Madame de Staël, conciliatory and judicious speech did not come naturally to Bonaparte. He was “eloquent only in abuse” and what he really wanted to say, she speculated, was: “You are a miserable bunch and I will have you shot if you do not do as I say.”

Bonaparte also met with fury and cries of “Down with the dictator!” Half-fainting, he was rescued by two grenadiers. His position was saved by his younger brother, Lucien, who put on a theatrical display for the grenadiers waiting outside the palace, swearing to stab his brother if he proved a traitor to the republic.

The soldiers marched into the council’s assembly hall and with fixed bayonets drove out the unarmed deputies. Within hours Bonaparte issued a proclamation presenting himself as having acted as “a citizen devoted to the Republic”, motivated by his sense of public duty to take office. “I believed it my duty to my fellow citizens, to the soldiers perishing in our armies, to the national glory bought with their blood to accept the command,” he later declared.



Marked man A portrait of Thomas-Alexandre Dumas. When Bonaparte learned that the republican general had criticised his leadership, he threatened to have him shot

A few days later, a new constitution was devised, inaugurating a regime that, for all Bonaparte’s words, was only nominally republican. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the statement of the founding principles of the revolution, which had served as the preface to the three previous constitutions, was omitted.

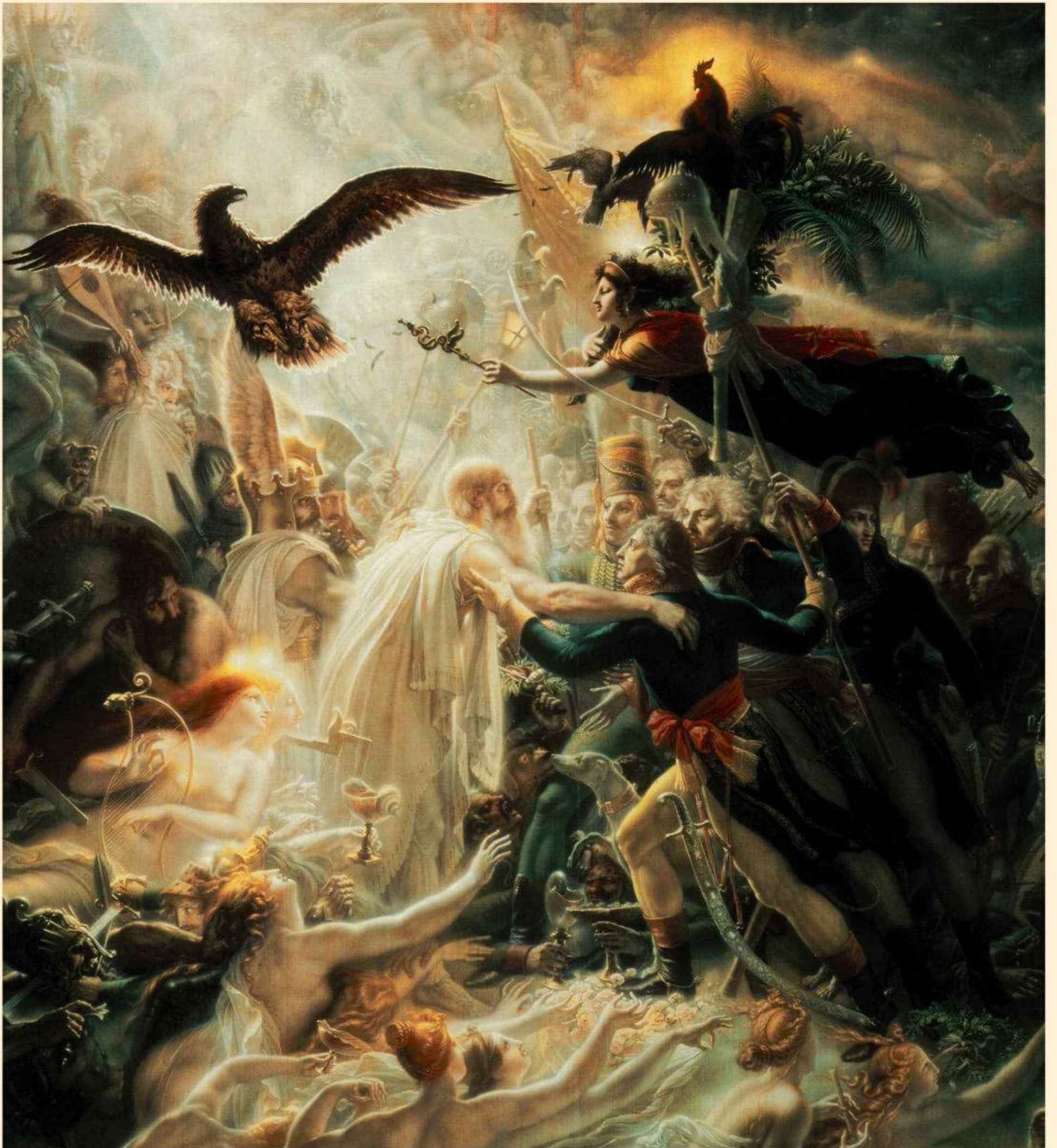
Sieyès had envisioned buying off Bonaparte by making him “Great Elector”, a title full of pomp, but with little power. Bonaparte would have none of it, enquiring if Sieyès imagined a man such as himself “would consent to be no more than a pig manured with millions, luxuriating in the royal palace at Versailles”.

Bonaparte had out-manoeuvred the man who had installed him and planned to control him. He would serve as First Consul, on a salary of 500,000 francs a year (Robespierre had lived on the equivalent of 6,570). There were two additional consuls, and the appearance of consultation, with three legislative bodies and a series of referendums, but the legislatures were talking shops, referendum results falsified.

One of the first casualties of Bonaparte’s rise to power was freedom of the press. In 1789 the revolutionaries had legalised freedom of speech, stating that “the free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man”. While this principle came under considerable stress after the execution of King Louis XVI in 1793, Bonaparte’s regime was far more systematic in destroying press freedom. “If I give it free reign,” he said, “I shall not remain in

The Rosetta Stone was one of the many ancient treasures looted from Egypt during Napoleon’s ill-fated invasion





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Fallen heroes Napoleon commissioned the artist Anne-Louis Girodet to paint this glorification of those who had died fighting for republican liberty, in 1800. It shows French generals, including Barthélemy Catherine Joubert and Lazare Hoche, being welcomed by Ossian (a popular folkloric character) into the afterlife. At the bottom of the painting are maidens with wine and flowers, welcoming the dead soldiers. Above the human figures, the Gallic cockerel symbolises French victory. The eagle symbolises Austria, defeated and put to flight by French forces.

power for three months.” In 1800 a decree suppressed 60 of the 73 newspapers in Paris. In 1811 the number of permitted newspapers was reduced to four.

The theatres of Paris had long been a place where opposition to the government was voiced: in 1807, 25 theatres were ordered to be closed, leaving just eight open. A secret police enforced censorship and arrested vocal opponents. It operated under the sinister Joseph Fouché, another Jacobin who had long since renounced his radical beliefs. For his services he was awarded the title of Duke of Otranto.

Much of the population, exhausted by years of revolution and instability, was prepared to accept Bonaparte. His principal opponents were people with strong political convictions: Jacobins and others who retained their republican beliefs; and royalists, who wanted a return to the old regime. Bonaparte was ruthless in exterminating opposition. When, in 1804, royalists launched the Cadoudal Plot, an attempt to assassinate Bonaparte and restore the Bourbon monarchy, Napoleon used it as an opportunity to decimate Jacobins who had no involvement, along with the actual conspirators.

What many ordinary people *did* want was a reconciliation with the Catholic church, which throughout the revolutionary years had been divided from France. In a tactical manoeuvre, Bonaparte obliged. On Easter Sunday 1802, a Concordat signed the previous year in Rome was published. It recognised that Catholicism, if not the state church of France, at least was “the religion of the great majority of Frenchmen”.

Bonaparte himself gave little sign of caring about religious belief. He was quick, however, to acknowledge its utility in reinforcing his position. In 1806, a new Catholic catechism was devised, article 7 of which involved pledging to, “Napoleon I, our emperor, love, respect, obedience, loyalty, military service... because God... whether for peace or for war, has made him the minister of His power and His image upon Earth.”

Two years earlier, in 1804, Bonaparte had crowned himself Emperor Napoleon. From that moment the republic had not even a notional existence. “The government of the republic is confided to an emperor,” he said, but the words were hollow. When Beethoven heard that Bonaparte had betrayed the ideals of the revolution by making himself emperor, he slashed out the dedication to the French leader on the title page of his Third Symphony, the *Eroica*.

Bonaparte was not an absolute dictator, in that he gave people things they wanted: stability, after years of uncertainty; reconciliation with the Catholic church; and military successes for France. His popular support depended on victories on the battlefield, and an economic system that fed France with tributes and recruits.

Yet Bonaparte’s military successes came at a cost – above all, in human lives. Around 50,000 people lost their lives in the Terror, 2,639 of whom were guillotined in Par-

is. Many thousands more died both in a civil war that erupted across the Vendée, and the revolutionary wars. Yet these figures are dwarfed by the number of casualties – French and non-French, soldiers and civilians – in the wars led by Napoleon. No one has ever clearly established the death toll, especially for civilians, but it numbers several million.

In 1790, the revolutionaries had abolished nobility, along with all privileges founded on heredity. Bonaparte made it clear that he did not care about a person’s political past – Jacobin, royalist, moderate – provided that they were now loyal to him and were prepared to drop their principles in his service. To encourage obedience, he awarded those who served him well with honours and titles. He also encouraged emigrés to return to France, provided they would give him their allegiance. In 1808 he set up a new imperial nobility. It was honorific, without the fiscal and legal privileges that had made the old regime nobles such a powerful force. With the new nobility, the emphasis lay more explicitly on the creation of wealth.

Like many rich and powerful men, Bonaparte used his status to cultivate a well-deserved reputation as a womaniser. But the truth was that he feared the kind of women he could not control – strong, intelligent women, such as Madame de Staël, the novelist and liberal theorist. She was no Jacobin, yet her intellectual salon and political criticisms infuriated him, and he reacted by banishing her from Paris, and banning her writings.

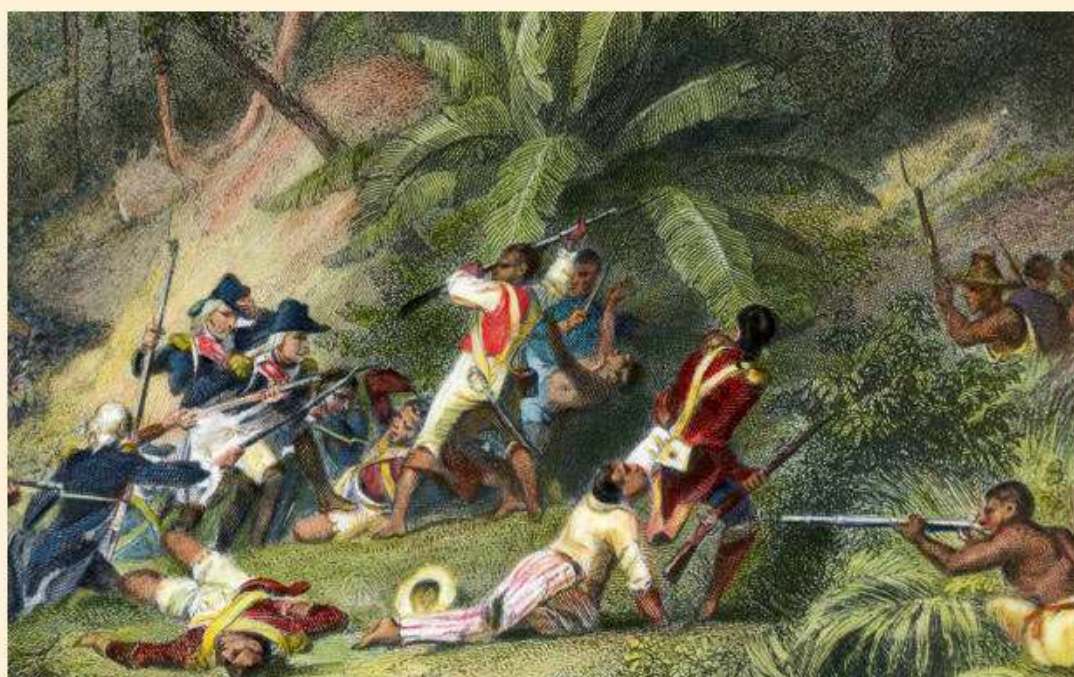
His mother, who had singlehandedly brought up eight children, remained for Napoleon the ideal of womanhood. “In France,” he said, “women are considered too highly. They should not be regarded as on equality with men... they are nothing more than machines for producing children.”

Established in 1804, the Napoleonic Code built on the legal achievements of the revolutionaries in some ways, while undermining them in others. Legal and civil rights for women, including equality of children’s inheritance rights regardless of gender, were partially or entirely rescinded. The revolutionary right to divorce, to which men and women had equal

“ When Beethoven heard that Bonaparte had made himself emperor, he slashed out the dedication to the French leader on the title page of his Third Symphony

Hard to control When the liberal theorist Madame de Staël criticised Bonaparte, he had her exiled and later banned her books





Freedom fighters An engraving shows the successful uprising of enslaved people in Saint-Domingue. Bonaparte's efforts to reimpose slavery on the island ended in failure



GETTY IMAGES

Absolute power Bonaparte depicted as emperor of France in c1804. By now he had his sights set on establishing a dynasty

access on grounds of incompatibility, was limited under Napoleon's code. While "the husband may demand divorce on cause of adultery on the part of his wife", a woman could only obtain a divorce if, in addition to adultery, her husband "shall have kept his concubine in their common house".

In February 1794, the revolutionaries had decreed an end to all slavery in France's territories. The decree aligned with the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, though the revolutionaries' immediate reasons were rather more pragmatic, and were passed in the wake of Toussaint Louverture's successful slave revolt in Saint-Domingue.

Bonaparte changed course completely, setting out to reimpose slavery throughout France's colonies, forcing formerly enslaved people back onto the plantations, and restoring the slave trade. He sent 20,000 soldiers to the Caribbean under the command of his brother-in-law Charles Leclerc to wage what Leclerc called a "war of extermination". Despite fierce resistance, slavery was reinstalled in Guadeloupe. Saint-Domingue was another matter. Napoleon's forces failed to retake the colony from the formerly enslaved who fought ferociously for their freedom.

"Damn sugar, damn coffee, damn colonies!" was Bonaparte's response. Saint-Domingue declared itself the Republic of Haiti. But Toussaint Louverture was captured and imprisoned in a fortress in the Jura mountains. Within a year he was dead, seen by many as a martyr for the cause of black liberty.

Foreign territories that came under Bonaparte's rule saw some of the benefits of the revolution – among them equality before the law and the aboli-

tion of feudal practices. But other peoples saw the imposition of French nationalism as a foreign invasion. In Spain, French soldiers met with fierce resistance.

That resistance was fanned by Bonaparte's decision to install his brother Joseph as Spanish king. As emperor, he placed relatives on thrones across Europe, and married the Hapsburg archduchess Marie-Louise. Their son was made King of Rome. When Bonaparte was forced to abdicate in 1814 he attempted to make his son his successor.

For many commentators, Bonaparte remains the heir of the revolution. Yet his determination to secure a family dynasty was just one example of the myriad ways in which he left the political radicalism of the 1780s and 90s far behind. He was a populist and militarist dictator, who used the revolution to climb to the pinnacle of power. When the coalition forces defeated him for the second time, at Waterloo in 1815, they put a Bourbon monarch, Louis XVIII, on the throne, a man who acted as though the revolution had never taken place.

For a while, the ideals of the French Revolution appeared to be all but extinguished. But it would fight back through the long and tumultuous 19th century. In fact, such was the strength of its resurgence that today its principles are seen as a foundation of modern democracy. For more than a decade, Napoleon Bonaparte had, it seems, strained every sinew to consign the revolution to the dustbin of history. And he almost succeeded. But not quite. **H**

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Marisa Linton is professor emerita in history at Kingston University London, and author of *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (OUP, 2013). You can hear her discuss the French Revolution on our podcast: historyextra.com/french-rev-everything

LISTEN Historian Andrew Roberts went in search of the real Napoleon for the BBC Radio 4 series **Napoleon: The Man and the Myths**. Listen here: bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05xx9pz



“ Bonaparte was a populist and militarist dictator, who used the revolution to climb to the pinnacle of power

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Facing the future

If you pledge to leave a gift in your Will, you'll help Cancer Research UK continue to save lives for future generations

History tends to celebrate heroic individuals and prominent figures, but it's often when we come together as a collective that we can achieve the most significant progress.

And that's why now is the perfect time for you to support Cancer Research UK's life-changing research by pledging to leave a gift in your Will. A third of its funding comes from gifts in Wills, making them a vital part of the fight against cancer.

Cancer Research UK is the only independently funded body to study more than 200 cancer types. With your donations, it's able to continue planning and investing in research projects that have huge potential in terms of beating cancer. So, by pledging to leave a gift in your Will, you'll not only be playing an integral role in helping to change lives now, but also for generations to come.

Breakthrough discoveries

With the support of people pledging gifts in Wills, Cancer Research UK helped establish the link between HPV and cervical cancer, which has played a significant part in it helping to double cancer survival over the last 40 years.

The human papillomavirus (HPV) infects the skin and cells that line the inside of your body. Around four in five people will be infected with HPV at some point in their lifetime, but most will never know they had it, as the infection usually clears up on its own without causing any symptoms.

There are hundreds of different types of HPV, with around 13 classed as 'high risk',

meaning they can cause cancer. Cervical cancer is the main type of cancer linked to HPV, and most cases of cervical cancer are caused by this virus.

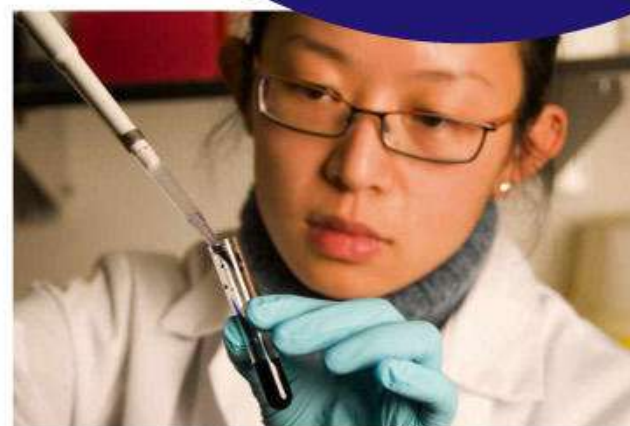
A huge step forward

The link between HPV and cervical cancer was fully established in 1999 when a group of scientists, including Cancer Research UK professor Julian Peto, proved that virtually all cervical cancer samples contained the virus. This ultimately led to the big switch in 2016, when it became standard practice to test women for signs of HPV infection, instead of looking for abnormal cells.

Their pioneering work overturned previous studies that underestimated the link, and it provided the evidence that would set the stage for today's HPV vaccination programme. Cancer Research UK led the nation's first trial of an HPV vaccine in the early 2000s. And now, for the first time, a study funded by Cancer Research UK has shown that the UK HPV vaccine programme works and will save lives. In the first study of its kind, the vaccine was shown to dramatically reduce cervical cancer rates by almost 90% in women in their 20s who were offered it between the ages of 12 and 13. The charity continues to fund life-saving research into cervical cancer.

All these momentous breakthroughs have been supported by the generosity of those who've left gifts in Wills. So, if you want to be part of this vital wave of human progress, get started by ordering a free Gifts in Wills Guide online.

"I want to leave a gift in my Will to Cancer Research UK to give other people the same chance that I've had."



Why leave a gift in your Will to Cancer Research UK?

- One in two of us will get cancer in our lifetime.*
- Gifts in Wills fund a third of Cancer Research UK's research, and are vital to accelerating progress to save more lives.
- A gift of £4,000 funds the online forum Cancer Chat for one week, helping thousands of people connect and share their stories through difficult times.
- Every donation helps Cancer Research UK learn faster. By pledging a Gift in your Will, you can support the charity's vision to bring forward the day when all cancers are cured.

*Ahmad AS et al. British Journal of Cancer, 2015

Jacky's story

Jacky Merrison was 52 when she was first diagnosed with cancer. Since then, she's survived three different types – and Cancer Research UK has been by her side throughout it all.

In June 1996, Jacky went for a check-up appointment for her breast cancer, and the doctor found a lump under her right arm. "I was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma," she says. She subsequently went through a series of check-ups, and it was during one of these sessions that the doctor discovered the cancer was also in Jacky's stomach and throat, meaning she would need chemotherapy.

Jacky was prescribed rituximab, a drug that was developed with the support of Cancer Research UK. "I thought I was going to lose my life, but instead that drug has given me my life back, as well as a better quality of living," explains Jacky. "I have Cancer Research to thank for that."

Now, Jacky is determined to do everything she can to help the charity continue its research. "I'd really like to help people who are in a similar situation to me. I want to leave a gift in my Will to Cancer Research UK to give other people the same chance that I've had."

Get involved

With your help, Cancer Research UK is determined to achieve its ambition of seeing three in four people survive their cancer by 2034. Every pledge that's made today helps support life-saving research, so more people like Jacky survive cancer in the future. If you want to be a part of something great, request your free Gifts in Wills guide to learn more about taking the first step.

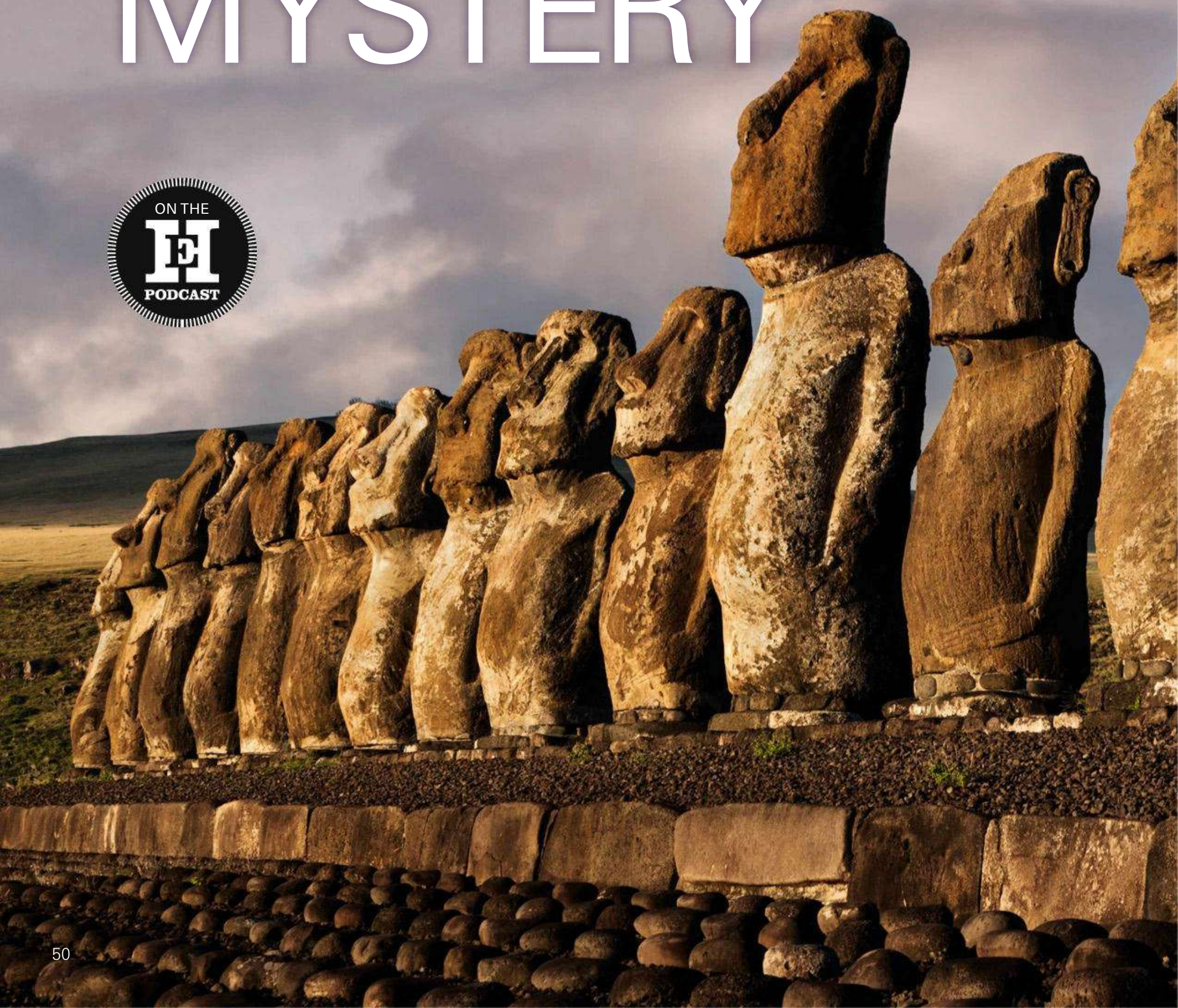


To find out more, request a free Gifts in Wills Guide at cruk.org/pledge

Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666), and the Isle of Man (1103) and Jersey (247)

Three centuries ago, when European explorers first sighted the Pacific island of Rapa Nui, it was home to a thriving population and hundreds of haunting moai statues. But, within a few generations, the landscape was decimated and its population in sharp decline. So what happened? **Cat Jarman** untangles

AN ISLAND MYSTERY





Staring at the sun
Moai statues at Ahu Tongariki, Rapa Nui's largest ceremonial structure. For centuries, visitors to the Pacific island (named "Easter Island" by the first Europeans to reach it) have puzzled over these beguiling figures and the fate of the people who designed them

The mystery of Rapa Nui

On Easter Sunday 1722, the Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen sighted a small, largely treeless island on his journey across the Pacific Ocean. It was located almost 2,000 miles from South America, the nearest continent, and more than 1,200 miles from the nearest island; it was one of the most remote and isolated locations in the world. Roggeveen's crew rejoiced, and he gave "to the land the name *Paásch Eyland* [Easter Island], because it was discovered by us on Easter Day".

Yet despite its remoteness, the sailor soon discovered that the island was already home to a population of settlers, who had arrived there centuries earlier: "We saw smoke rising in several places," Roggeveen reported, "from which we concluded that there were people dwelling on the same." Those people had named their home *Te Pito o te Henua* – the navel of the world – or, more commonly, Rapa Nui. The Dutch explorers estimated that the population, known as the Rapanui, numbered around 3,000, and described it as "healthy".

In 1774 Captain Cook also visited the island, while searching for a new continent in the frigid waters of the southern Pacific. After two months at sea, his crew were exhausted and debilitated by scurvy, and in desperate need of provisions. They headed to Rapa Nui, but were surprised by what they found: a barren island with neither wood nor much fresh water on its roughly 164 sq km. "Nature," Cook noted, "has been exceedingly sparing of her favours to the spot."

The crew described a population estimated to be no more than 700, lacking in tools, shelter and clothing, who spent all of their time "providing food to support their precarious existence". The giant stone statues called



Bleak future

An engraving of a "woman of Easter Island" by English writer Frederic Shoberl in the 1820s. Over the following decades, Rapa Nui's population plummeted. But why?

The island's fate became one of the world's best-known parables for human selfishness

moai that dotted the island must surely have been produced at an earlier time when the island flourished, for the current population, Cook's naturalist remarked, had neither tools nor spare time for such vanity projects.

In an expedition 12 years later, the French explorer La Pérouse speculated that the islanders' ancestors must have foolishly cut down all the trees, with disastrous effects for the island's environment. Later, others doubted that these seemingly simple inhabitants could have possessed the cultural complexity to create the huge statues.

Within a century of La Pérouse's visit, the island was catastrophically depopulated, and by the 20th century the apparent mysteries of its decline became one of the world's best-known parables for human selfishness and self-created environmental disasters. But is the truth behind the disappearance of the Rapanui really what we have been led to believe?

Self-inflicted tragedy?

To many, Rapa Nui is best known for its so-called ecocide (ecological suicide), as popularised by the American author Jared Diamond in his bestseller *Collapse*. Here, Diamond elaborated on the hypothesis, first made by those 18th-century explorers, that the population of Rapa Nui caused its own demise due to selfish environmental destruction.

The hypothesis is grounded in two points. First, that the lush palm trees that formerly covered the island were deliberately cut down to move the moai. The lack of trees rapidly led to soil erosion and poor crop yields, and a shortage of wood for making canoes to catch fish. As the archaeologists Paul Bahn and John Flenley remarked in chilling tones, this deforestation was seen as deliberate and callous: "The person who felled the last tree could see it was the last tree. But he (or she) still felled it."

Second, the ecocide hypothesis assumes that there was a major depopulation from several tens of thousands of inhabitants in the island's heyday to as few as 700 in the 18th century – Captain Cook's estimate. The reason for this was said to be internecine warfare and even cannibalism, caused by fierce competition over dwindling resources. As a result, carving of moai intensified in attempts to prove status and to stake claim to land. According to the Norwegian anthropologist Thor Heyerdahl, this all culminated in a major battle in 1680 that killed off the majority of one of the island's tribes.

But is any of this really true? New research and a closer inspection of the sources reveals a very different story.

To really understand Rapa Nui's history,



A dot in the ocean As our map shows, Rapa Nui is one of the world's most remote islands. It was settled by Polynesians sailing east in around AD 1200



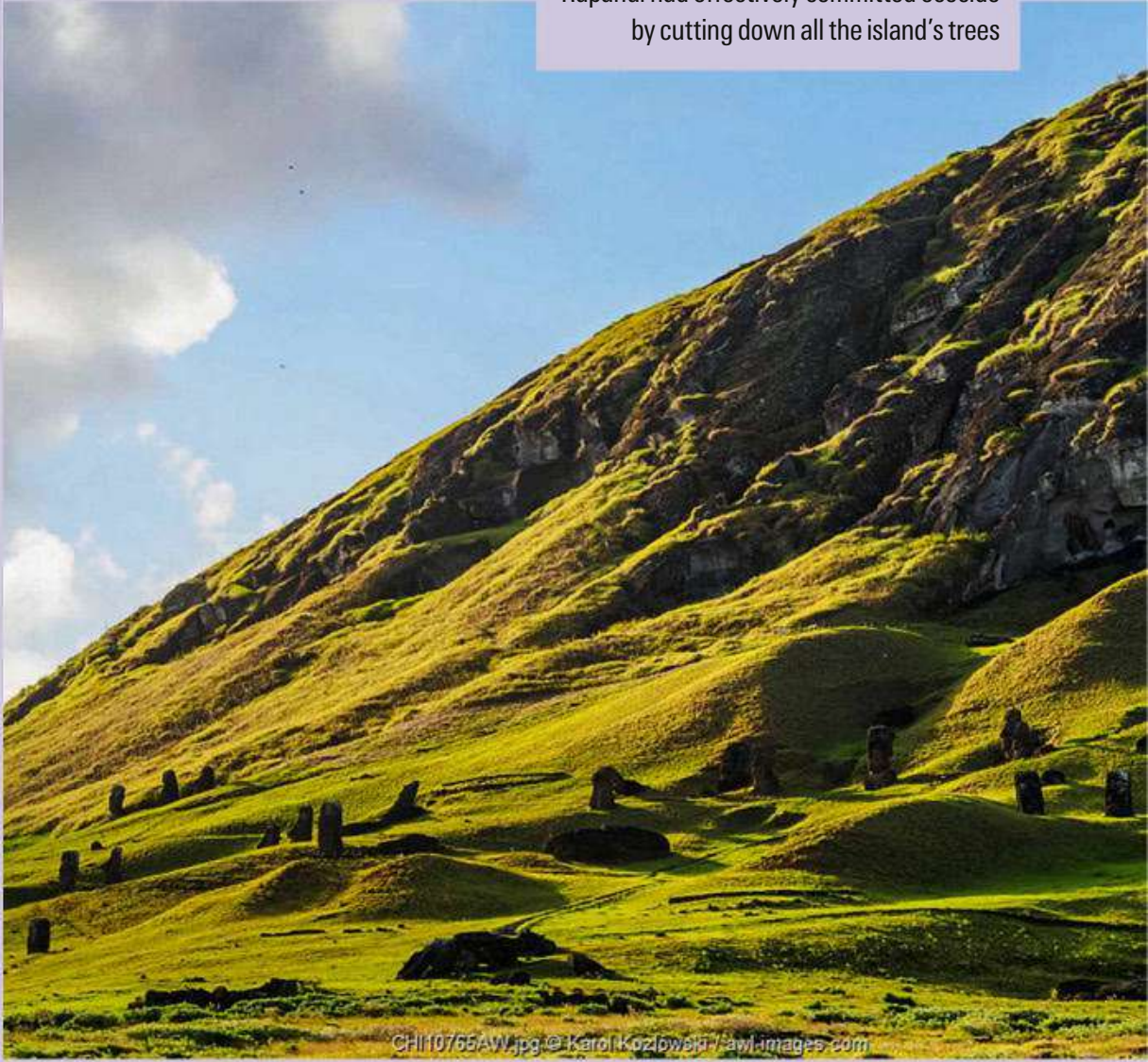
Close encounters
 ABOVE AND TOP: Inhabitants of Rapa Nui, shown in illustrations based on depictions in an atlas to James Cook's voyages. On reaching Rapa Nui in 1774, the explorer described a bleak, barren landscape

Standing proud
 Dutch navigator Jacob Roggeveen, who in 1722 became the first European to reach Rapa Nui, studies Moai statues, as depicted in a c19th-century engraving

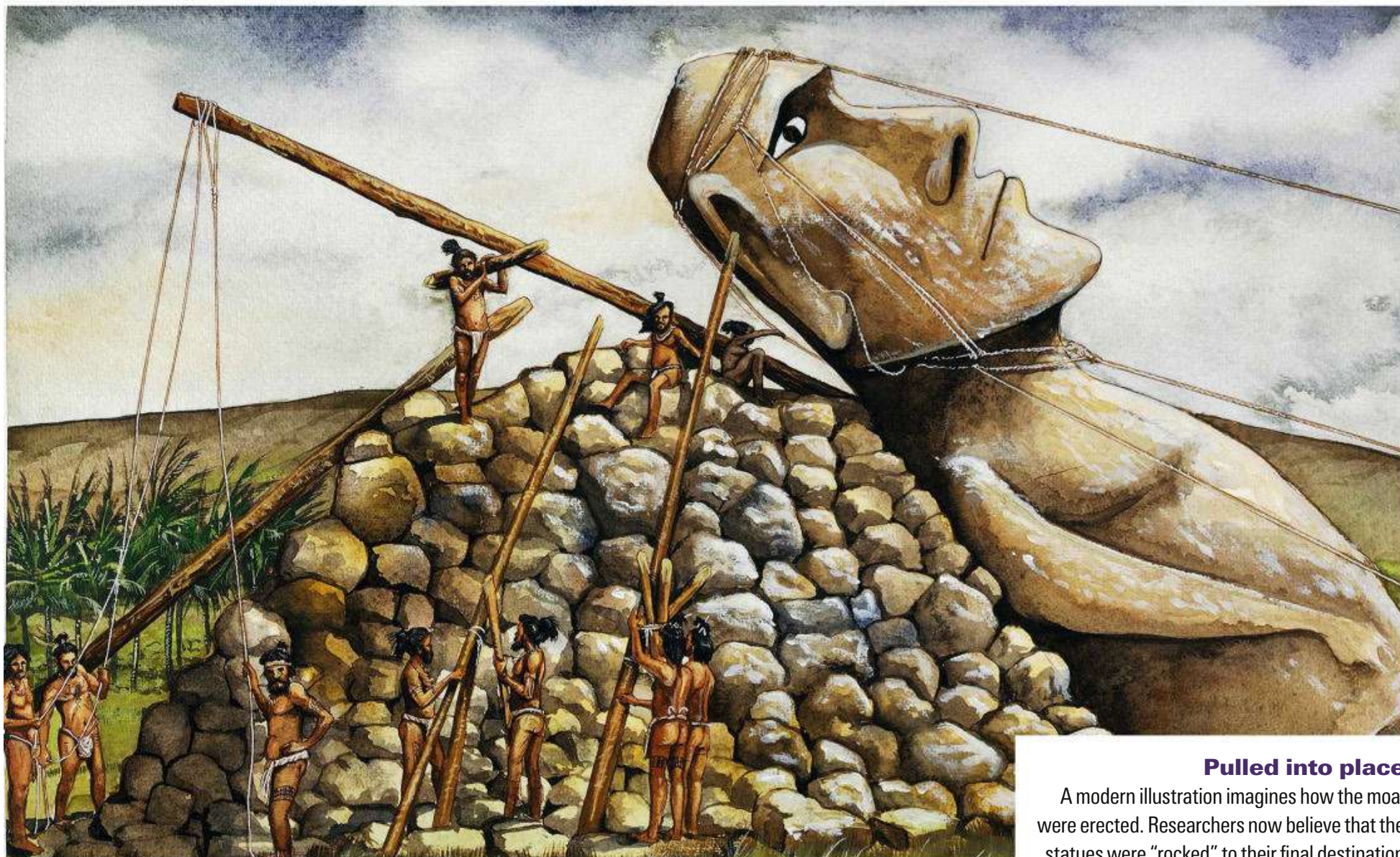


Myth of the land

The slopes of Rano Raraku volcano, dotted with moai statues, in the south-west of Rapa Nui. It was long believed that the Rapanui had effectively committed ecocide by cutting down all the island's trees



The mystery of Rapa Nui



Pulled into place

A modern illustration imagines how the moai were erected. Researchers now believe that the statues were “rocked” to their final destination – with two groups rocking them from side to side while a third kept them upright – rather than rolled on logs (as was previously theorised)

we need to go back to its origins. When was the island first settled, and by whom? Thor Heyerdahl argued that the population must have originated in the Americas, because of similarities in art found in both places. He also believed that a more superior race must have been responsible for the island’s advanced achievements.

Yet the overwhelming evidence shows that the island was in fact settled by people from the west, from Polynesia. This can be seen in archaeological evidence, such as pottery styles, as well as in linguistics – the native tongue belongs to the Polynesian language family. And studies of ancient DNA extracted from human remains on Rapa Nui have found no evidence of South American DNA before European contact.

While it was previously thought that the island was settled as early as AD 700, new radiocarbon dates show the settlement took place around AD 1200. Soon, the island was clearly flourishing. A written language – *rongorongo* – still undeciphered, also appeared.

We have no certain way of estimating how big the population of the island might originally have been, although a recent study suggests it could have supported up to 15,000 people. This uncertainty makes the question of depopulation – a central point in the ecocide hypothesis – a tricky one to assess. The population estimates made

by the early explorers vary widely, from 700 to 3,000, in part because they spent very little time on the island at all.

Weapons of war?

In reality, there is no definite proof that the population declined before European contact. Heyerdahl’s seismic battle of 1680 cannot be proven, although there are ethnographic reports from the early 20th century that suggest there had been some recent warfare between competing island groups. Obsidian flakes known as *mata’a*, which are frequently found littering the island’s surface, have been interpreted as weapon fragments, suggesting battles were waged across Rapa Nui. But now, researchers believe the *mata’a* were in fact domestic tools or even implements used for ritual tasks. Ancient human remains that have been studied from the

There is no definitive proof that **the island’s population declined before European contact**

Lost for words

A wooden fish inscribed with text. A written language – *rongorongo* – appeared in Rapa Nui soon after it was settled in c1200, but it remains undeciphered



THE MAGNIFICENT MOAI

Cat Jarman answers key questions about the enigmatic statues

How many statues are there?

The Rapanui are believed to have carved more than 950 statues, ranging in size from 2–10 metres tall and weighing up to 74 metric tons each.

When were the moai constructed?

There are no written records of when the statues were carved, and it is impossible to date the stone moai directly. We believe they were carved soon after the island was settled in around AD 1200, and that statue carving continued at least until AD 1650.

How were they made?

Most of the moai were carved from volcanic tuff, a porous stone found in the quarry of Rano Raraku, one of the island's volcanic craters. The stone is relatively easy to carve. At least 10 moai were carved from basalt, a much harder stone.

It's believed that the statues were carved in the quarry then moved to their final locations, where their bases were flattened to make them stable. Some of

the statues have a stone cylinder resembling a hat on top of their heads: these are called *pukao* and are made of a red stone called *scoria*. Many moai originally had inlaid eyes of white coral.

Where are they located?

Around 400 moai remain at the stone quarry at Rano Raraku, while others are dotted around the island's landscape: some of these were likely abandoned on their journey down from the quarries, perhaps because they fell during transport. Hundreds of moai were placed, often several next to each other, on large, ceremonial platforms called *ahu* (pictured, below). Some researchers believe statues were sited at locations that marked territorial boundaries, while others have proposed that the *ahu* were placed near freshwater sources. The moai stand with their backs towards the sea, facing inwards.

How were they moved?

Some statues were moved up to 11 miles over rugged terrain. But how? This has been one of Rapa Nui's great mysteries. It was once thought that they must have

been transported on timber sledges or rolled down the hills from the quarries on logs. It was even believed that the decline of the forests denied the islanders the sledges they needed to move the statues, leading to extensive competition and warfare.

Now, experiments have shown that the statues were actually moved by tying ropes around their heads that were pulled alternately from opposite sides. This caused the statues to rock from side to side, meaning that they could be "walked" to their final destinations. This was possible because of their carefully designed centre of gravity. There is even a local word for this motion: *neke-neke*, which translates as "inching forward by moving the body with disabled legs".

What do they represent?

The moai represent the islanders' ancestors and have been described as the "living faces" of the past. They may have been created to represent specific individuals and held a sacred role in Rapa Nui society, serving as a way to communicate with the gods.

The moai of Ahu Tongariki. Some statues were "walked" as far as 11 miles over rugged terrain from the quarry where they were carved



The mystery of Rapa Nui



Food source

Faced with the challenges of deforestation and poor soil, the Rapanui grew plants such as banana inside stone enclosures called *manavai*, like the one pictured here



Low point

Hanga Roa, the principal town of Rapa Nui. When Chile annexed the island in 1888, it was here that most of the disease and violence-depleted native population was confined

island show very little evidence of traumatic injury, and there is no evidence for cannibalism either. Perhaps the Rapanui were more peaceful than previously thought?

Intensive farming

Visitors to the island today will have no trouble recognising Cook's description of a barren land, with little more than patches of grassland covering its steep, volcanic slopes. The decimation of the landscape, however, can be traced to events that transpired after Cook's visit: in 1888 the island was annexed by Chile, and between 1903 and 1953 most of it was rented out for intensive sheep farming, which ravaged the local ecosystem. So why did Cook say it was barren earlier?

We know from archaeological research and pollen samples that the island was once home to large palms and other trees but at some point, these disappeared. The ecocide explanation was that the trees were cut down to transport the moai, but that could not have been the case. Researchers now agree that the statues were not rolled on logs, but *rocked*. The moai were actually moved from the stone quarries by tying ropes around their heads, pulling on both sides and letting them "walk" down to their final destinations.

So, if the trees were not cut down to move statues, why did they disappear? It seems the main culprits were actually not human at all: instead, the trees disappeared largely because

of the Polynesian rat. The slow-growing *Jubea* – the large palm tree that once existed on the island – produced palm nuts, and the first human settlers on the island brought rats with them. Research on other islands has shown that rats can have a devastating effect on vegetation, because they often subsist on the seeds of native plants. Archaeologists have found ancient palm nuts with distinctive gnaw marks on their shells on the island. This meant that once the older trees disappeared, the palms could not regenerate.

Another blow to the ecocide theory is new research that shows the lack of trees did *not* cause famine or a major disaster on the island. Instead, archaeological evidence demonstrates that the native Rapanui were actually able to thrive despite difficult environmental circumstances. The islanders subsisted on a number of different plants including banana, taro and sweet potato, which were grown inside stone enclosures called *manavai*. In order to make the most of the low nutrition in the soil and lack of consistent rainfall, stone mulch – a layer of stones covering the soil surface – was used to increase crop yields.

Chickens were eaten for food and also served as a source of manure, as did guano (seabird excrement). The abundant rats were considered tasty snacks. Although the waters around the island were surprisingly low in marine species, recent chemical analysis of



Rat attack

Nuts of the extinct Rapa Nui palm. Rodents may have wreaked havoc on the island's vegetation



From the depths

Canoeists pictured during the Tapati festival, 2016. Around 3,500 people living on the island now consider themselves Rapanui; in 1877, the island's population was just 111

ancient human remains has shown that fish was still an important part of diets.

All in all, researchers now agree that rather than destroying and mismanaging their environment, the Rapanui were well adapted, and highly capable of resilience and sustainable living in a challenging landscape.

Devastating impact

With little warfare and no major environmental disasters, what, then, caused Rapa Nui's population to dwindle dramatically by the 19th century? The real disaster was the impact of visitors from Europe and the Americas, which was profound and devastating. Although many of them were relatively peaceful sailors and whalers, the crews of several ships saw the population as a cheap source of labour; even worse, women were frequently raped. By 1830, there was widespread violence between natives and visitors, and sexually transmitted diseases became endemic.

Then, in 1862, a major slave raid was launched from Peru. In the coming years, South American slavers took away as much as half the island's population, although an international outcry led to a number of the enslaved people being repatriated. Devastatingly, many of those who were allowed to return had been infected with smallpox. The disease had a severe impact on the remaining

Homeward bound?

Hoa Hakananai'a, "one of the finest and rarest basalt moai", has been in the British Museum since 1869. In recent years, calls for its return have been growing

population, and by 1877 the Rapanui numbered just 111. When Chile took over, the survivors were confined to the enclosed town of Hanga Roa. It was only in the middle of the 20th century that the island could begin its slow road to recovery.

Today, in a gallery on the ground floor of the British Museum, a large, solitary figure serves as a bittersweet reminder of Rapa Nui's fate. *Hoa Hakananai'a*, one of the finest and rarest basalt moai, was given to the museum by Queen Victoria in 1869. She had been gifted it by the admiralty after the HMS *Topaze* had removed it from Rapa Nui on a visit the year before.

While the statue's presence in London allows millions of visitors from around the globe to appreciate one of the world's greatest sculptural traditions, the islanders see him as one of their ancestors. His name means "lost or stolen friend", and the island has formally requested to have him back. The museum has so far declined the request. The future of *Hoa Hakananai'a* is uncertain, just like the island on which it once stood. **H**

South American
slavers took away
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population

Cat Jarman is an archaeologist who specialises in Rapa Nui and the Viking age. She will be appearing on our podcast soon to talk about the island in more detail: historyextra.com/podcast

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

Is it true that Pepsi briefly owned Soviet warships?

▶▶▶ As remarkable as it may seem, Pepsi did indeed own Soviet warships. It all started back in 1989, when a Norwegian shipping company owned by a friend of Pepsi CEO Donald M Kendall announced it had brokered a deal to buy Soviet warships and pay for them, in part, with Pepsi. A joint venture was formed between Pepsi, the Norwegian firm and the Soviet government to facilitate the trade, with Pepsi taking 25 per cent of the ships' sales price as payment for Soviet Pepsi imports. One year later, Kendall signed another deal, worth an estimated \$3bn, this time trading Pepsi for Stolichnaya vodka and at least 10 Soviet-built ships.

Both deals worked around a long-standing obstacle to trading with the Soviets. The rouble was non-convertible – that is, it was worthless outside the Soviet Union. Because the Soviet government was perpetually short of convertible, or “hard”, currency, it often resorted to bartering for imports. Since

1972, it had bartered vodka for Pepsi syrup, which it mixed with carbonated water and bottled domestically. Pepsi embraced this arrangement, reasoning its first-mover advantage would pay off when the rouble became convertible. In the meantime, Stolichnaya vodka became less desirable, especially after American consumers boycotted it in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This helps explain why ships were thrown into the 1990 bargain.

It has often been suggested that, by owning these ships, Pepsi became one of the largest navies in the world. In reality, it never took possession of the vessels acquired under the 1989 deal, which were always intended to go to the Norwegian firm, and were in fact sent to the scrap heap because they were obsolete. As for the 1990 deal, it collapsed along with the USSR.

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Kristy Ironside, assistant professor of Russian history at McGill University

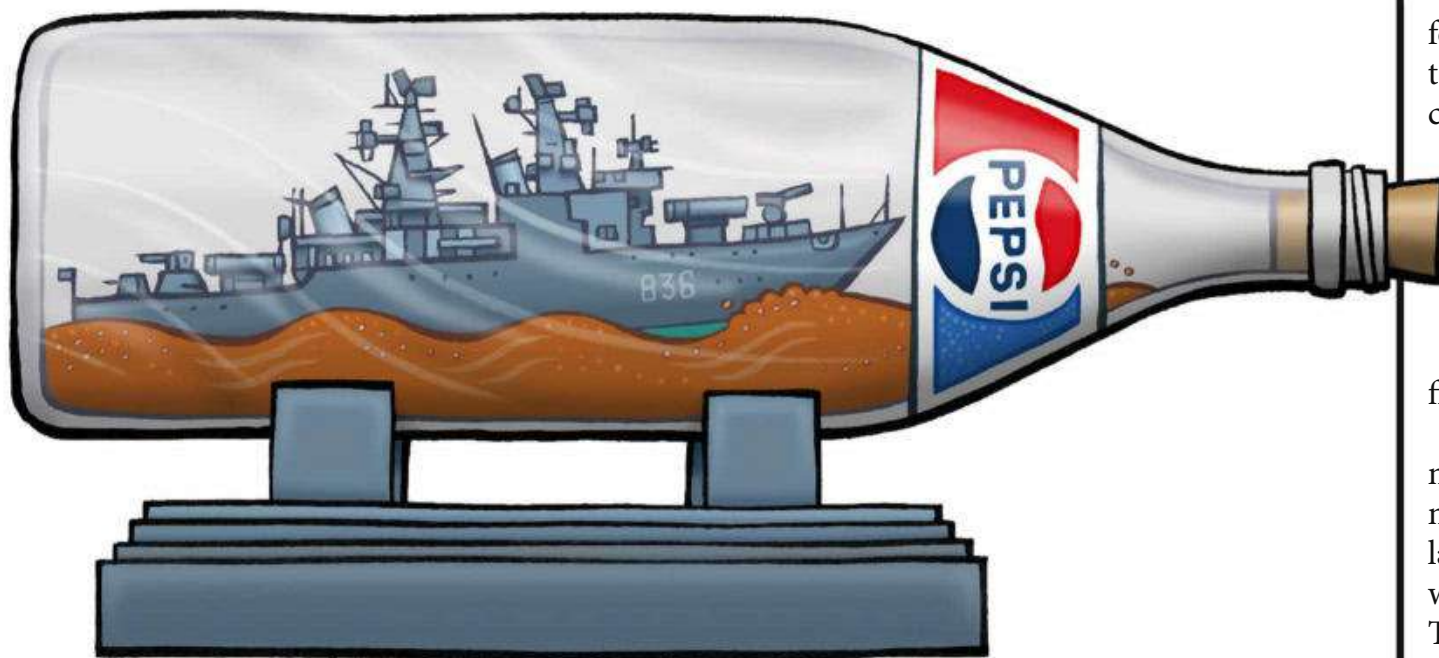
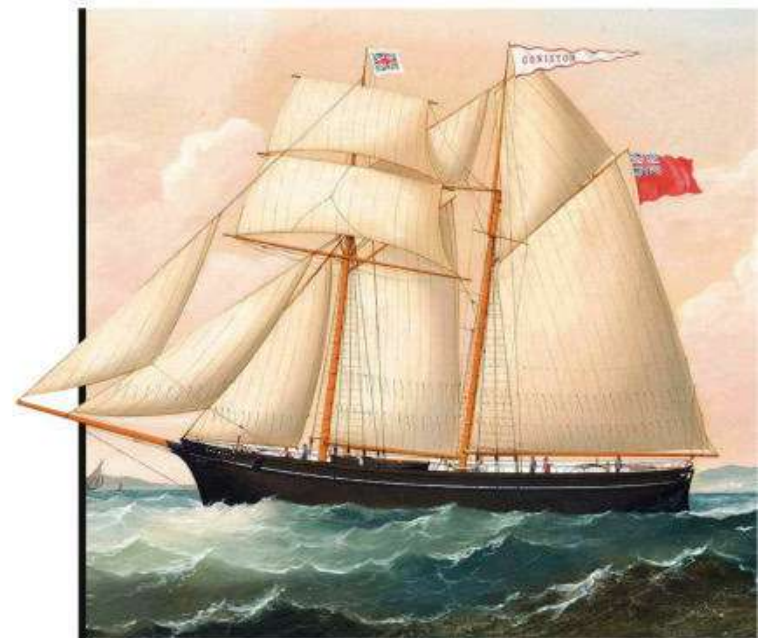


ILLUSTRATION BY @GLENMCILLUSTRATION



A painting of the *Coniston*. The tragedy that befell the schooner may have been caused by the changing of the clocks

What is the greatest mishap caused by someone not realising the clocks had moved forward or back?

▶▶▶ Governments everywhere have long tinkered with the clocks, usually to save energy and maximise daylight for agriculture – hence the introduction of British Summer Time in 1916.

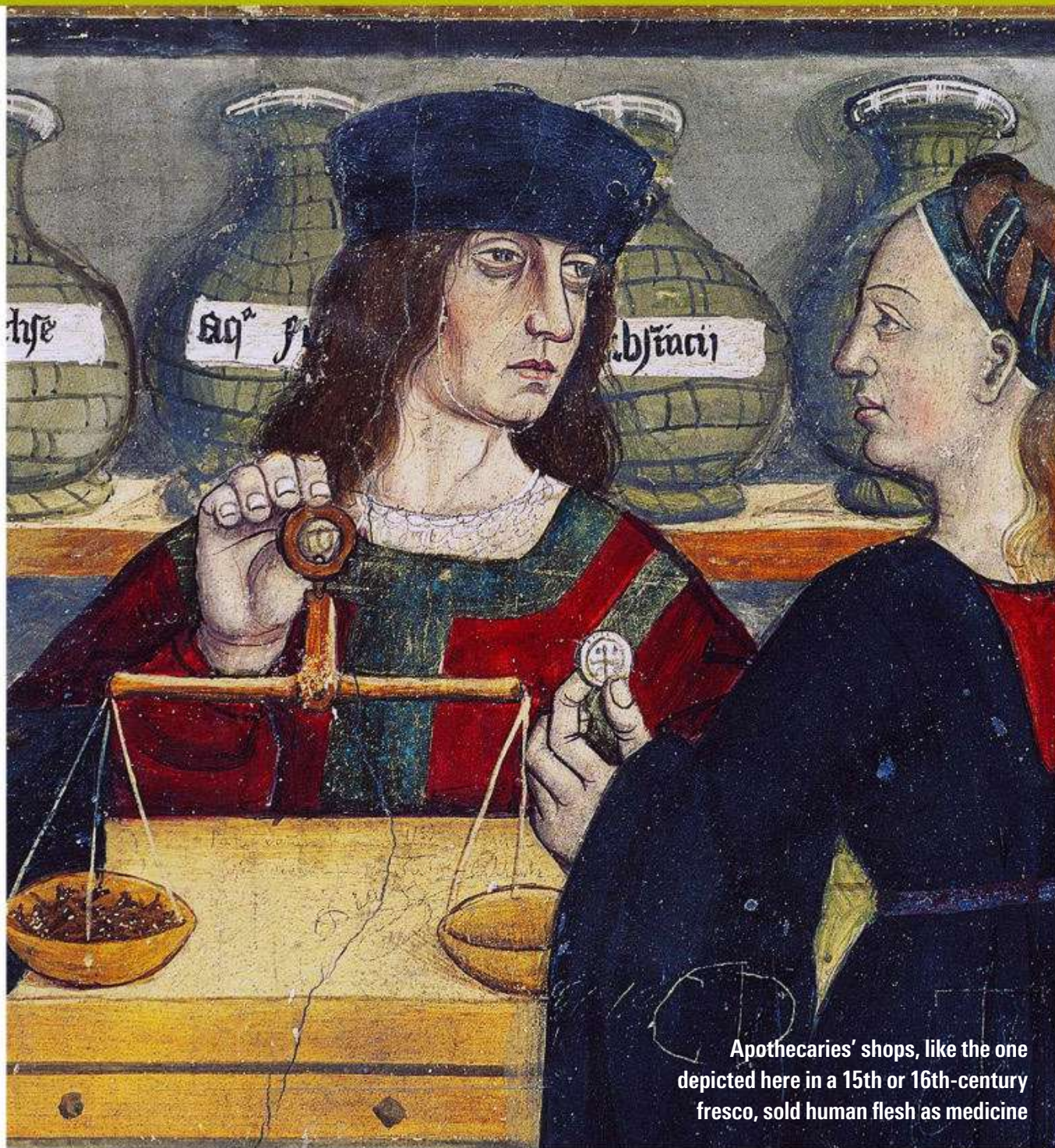
The UK government has made periodic changes ever since, but mishaps from people not remembering the clocks have changed are usually trivial things like Sunday footballers turning up an hour late.

However, one possible contender for the biggest accident is the loss of the schooner *Coniston* in 1917. It was coming in to Millom in Cumbria from Ireland with a cargo of timber, and onlookers on shore could see the ship was in trouble but were unable to help because of heavy weather. *Coniston* was later found overturned on a sandbank, with all five people aboard dead or missing.

It was suggested that the schooner might not have turned turtle had its master entered the channel an hour later, but the tide tables he was using were printed in Greenwich Mean Time, while his watch would have been set to British Summer Time.

.....
Eugene Byrne, author and journalist specialising in history

ALAMY



Apothecaries' shops, like the one depicted here in a 15th or 16th-century fresco, sold human flesh as medicine

What was mummia, and how was it used?

➤➤➤ Mummia, or mummy, originally described desiccated human corpse matter sourced from mummified bodies imported from the Middle East, and was prescribed and ingested for its supposed healing powers. However, this type of mummia was not always available, and in 16th and 17th-century Europe, mummia also referred to the flesh and excretions from specially prepared, recently deceased corpses – usually those of executed criminals or the socially disenfranchised.

Matter sourced from a fresh corpse, preferably that of a youth who had met a sudden and violent end, was the most highly prized “modern” mummia. This was because many people believed that a swift death captured the body’s healing force, while a slow death served to deplete it.

In western medicine, the belief in the mysterious healing power of the human body goes back to ancient times and was central to the medical ingestion of

mummia. In 16th and 17th-century England, it was an important drug in the pharmacological arsenal and easily obtained from apothecary shops. As the character Rollyardo tells us in James Shirley’s 1633 play *The Bird in a Cage*: “Make Mummy of my flesh and sell me to the Apothecaries.”

Mummia was prescribed in *pharmacopoeias* (books containing lists of medical drugs and their effects) of the age for a whole slew of ailments. These included epilepsy, difficulty in labour, menstrual problems, coughs, palpitations of the heart, pestilence, abscesses and carbuncles.

Mummia’s availability as a medical drug persisted into the early 20th century, when it was still sold in pharmacies. In fact, it appeared in pharmaceutical catalogues as late as 1908.

.....
Louise Noble, author of *Medical Cannibalism in Early Modern English Language and Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

DID YOU KNOW...?

Long in the tea bag

The pantomime character Widow Twankey (shown in an 1896 image) derives her name from a type of cheap China tea.

In 1861, the Victorian journalist and dramatist Henry James Byron wrote a play called *Aladdin or The Wonderful Scamp* which introduced the widow. The name Byron used for her, originally Twankay, referred to an inferior brand of green tea from the Tunxi district of eastern China. To audiences at the time, the name would have subtly implied that the widow was well past her prime.



Gould medal

In 1908, the London Olympics featured *jeu de paume*, the version of tennis favoured by kings such as Henry VIII and Charles II, for the only time in the history of the games. Eleven players competed for the Olympic title, nine from Great Britain and two from the United States. After several rounds, the gold medal winner was Jay Gould, grandson of the ruthless financier of the same name, one of the so-called “robber barons” of the late 19th century.

Crack shot

The sharpshooter Annie Oakley (pictured) once shot the ash off a cigarette held by the future German kaiser Wilhelm II. Annie toured Europe in 1887 with Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. Her party piece involved shooting the glowing end from a cigarette clamped between the lips of her husband. In Berlin, Wilhelm, then crown prince, saw her act and asked to take her husband’s place. Annie agreed but suggested the prince should hold the cigarette in his hands, not his mouth. **H**

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Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history



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BBC **HiSTORY** MAGAZINE



“Mary Seacole
never aspired to be
a pioneer of **women’s**
nursing. It is only in
recent decades that
we have invested her
with this status”

Helen Rappaport, who has spent
20 years researching Mary Seacole’s
life, argues that the Jamaican
healer’s transformation into
a modern cultural icon has
obscured the real woman



Albert Charles Challen’s 1869 portrait
of Mary Seacole, now on display in
the National Portrait Gallery.
The sitter’s identity was unknown
until Helen Rappaport identified
her as Seacole in 2002



Mary Seacole

In the days before the advent of the internet, anyone intent on seeking out the story of the black Jamaican healer and entrepreneur Mary Seacole would have been hard-pressed to find any information on her. There was her brief memoir, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*, published in 1857 to help relieve the crushing debts that had landed her in the bankruptcy court at the end of the Crimean War. But this little book with thin cardboard covers was, unfortunately, not printed to last. Today, only a handful of copies of the original version survive, in repositories such as the British Library and Oxford and Cambridge universities.

It was not until the republication of this long-forgotten memoir in 1984 by Falling Wall Press, a small feminist imprint in Bristol, that Mary Seacole began to re-emerge from a century of obscurity. The years since have seen her experience a meteoric rise: being named the Greatest Black Briton in 2004; my discovery of a lost portrait, unveiled at the National Portrait Gallery for her bicentenary in 2005; and the erection of the imposing Seacole statue on London's South Bank in 2016.

Today, Mary Seacole is an inspirational figure to many nurses and healthcare workers – black and white – in the UK and the West Indies alike. She features strongly in Key Stage 2 of the national curriculum, and is a British cultural icon. Every British school-child knows who Mary Seacole was – even if their own parents do not. But how much of what we think we know is accurate?

A doctress's daughter

Seacole was born Mary Grant on 23 November 1805 – according to the National Library of Jamaica, at least, though documentary proof of this date has yet to surface. She was fortunate not to be born into slavery: her mother, Rebecca, a free woman of colour, gave birth to Mary in a small village in St Elizabeth parish (not in Kingston, as Mary states in her memoir). Mary's father was a Scottish soldier, John Grant.

Rebecca was a doctress – a woman with folk medicine and other healing knowledge. She passed on her nursing and herbalist skills to Mary at the lodging house Rebecca ran in Kingston, when such places effectively functioned as nursing homes for officers of the British Army and Royal Navy while they recovered from sickness. (At that time, cholera and yellow fever were rife among white planters and military men in Jamaica.)

In 1836, Mary married a white merchant, Edwin Seacole, but he was sickly and died in 1844. Thereafter she built up a considerable reputation among British troops who stayed



War heroine

This photograph of Seacole (dating to the late 1860s/early 1870s) depicts her wearing medals – accolades for her work during the Crimean War

at her lodging house in Kingston. When she arrived in Crimea some years later she was already known to many there as a skilful nurse and healer. However, she was also an ambitious entrepreneur who made a good living selling pies, pickles and preserves.

Always on the lookout for new business ventures, in the early 1850s Seacole sought to tap into the market created by the California gold rush, and headed to the Isthmus of Panama, across which prospectors were travelling. Her attempts to run a hotel and restaurant there were, though, thwarted by difficulties engendered by the tropical climate, the high incidence of disease and the lawlessness of her clientele in what was then an unruly frontier area.

Receiving news of the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854, Seacole sailed to England to offer her services to her “sons” of the British Army as nurse and provisioner, but the offer was declined by officials. Undaunted, she travelled at her own expense to Crimea, where she set up a storehouse and canteen near the army camps, at a place she named Spring Hill. Here she offered not just hot dinners and every possible basic commodity to the weary British troops, but also



Comfort and succour

Mrs Rogers, an army wife, prepares food for the 4th Dragoon Guards during the Crimean War. Ever the entrepreneur, Mary Seacole set up a "hotel" near Balaclava to supply food and care to troops

ran effectively an unofficial drop-in clinic – free of charge – for the sick or wounded.

As one newspaper correspondent confirmed: "The number of navvies and Land Transport Corps men who have been cured by her of the head-aches, stomach-aches, fevers, and other maladies, rendered the doctors almost jealous of her."

Many troops spoke warmly of Seacole as a Good Samaritan who offered tea, sympathy, motherly affection and first aid without question to all who solicited it. Such was her fame across the Crimean peninsula as "a doctress for cholera and diarrhoea", whose holistic remedies proved far more effective than conventional treatments, that sick soldiers beat a path to her door in preference to consulting the army doctors.

Widespread acclaim

Word of "Mrs Seacole's" humanitarian exploits soon reached Britain, thanks to newspaper reports by journalists such as William Howard Russell of *The Times*. As a result, on her return to England in the autumn of 1856 she enjoyed widespread celebration as a "Crimean War heroine".

Yet her modern reputation as "the Black

Seacole enjoyed the fame accorded her at a time when black women and men were utterly marginalised

Florence Nightingale" and an important pioneer of women's nursing is a distortion of her true contribution. Such claims were not made of her at the time, and both are problematic.

Mary truly admired Florence Nightingale, and never promoted herself as the latter's medical equal. Nightingale established the first training school for nurses at St Thomas' Hospital after the war. She contributed to the postwar Royal Commission on the Health of the Army, and was a vigorous advocate of urban sanitation and public health reform. Her *Notes on Nursing*, first published in 1859, has never gone out of print.

Twenty years of researching Seacole's life has left me with one overwhelming impression: that she was, as one soldier defined her, "a good mother, doctor and nurse to all". In other words, Seacole's brand of "nursing" was a form of *mothering* – of comforting the sick and wounded in the absence of their own wives and mothers – complemented with her natural holistic remedies.

Such compassion cannot be taught; it is instinctive. Nevertheless, the claim persists – especially in some Key Stage 2 sources – that she built and ran a hospital in Crimea. She did not; indeed, Seacole never nursed there in any official capacity. Nor did she, as has been fancifully suggested, carry wounded soldiers off the battlefield. This image of Seacole as some kind of go-getting Victorian paramedic has gathered traction since the late 1990s, creating a brand of hagiography that does the real woman a disservice.

Seacole's admirers are right to see in her a laudable role model, epitomising women's nursing of a personalised, hands-on, compassionate style, as opposed to the starchy, disciplined image of the traditional Nightingale nurse. But Seacole herself never aspired to be a pioneer of women's nursing; nor did she take any active role in its formal development. It is only in recent decades that we have invested her retrospectively with this status.

Unique celebration

There is no doubt that Mary Seacole basked in her celebrity after her return from the Crimean War. She enjoyed every minute of the fame accorded her by Victorian Britain, at a time when black women and men were utterly marginalised. Such a celebration was unique in the mid-1850s: at the high point of her celebrity, in 1857 and 1858, she was undoubtedly the most famous black woman in the British empire.

Ironically, though, Seacole never ever thought of herself as "black". Indeed, she made much of her mixed-heritage ancestry, in particular her white Scottish father of whom she was inordinately proud. At times

TIMELINE

The life of Mary Seacole

1805 Mary Grant is born at Haughton, a hamlet in St Elizabeth parish, Jamaica, to a Scottish father and a free woman of colour

1836 Mary marries Edwin Seacole, a white merchant

1844 Edwin Seacole dies. Mary runs a successful lodging house in Kingston

1851 Mary nurses during fever epidemics on the Isthmus of Panama, a shortcut route taken by prospectors heading to the Californian gold fields

1854 Britain joins the war in Crimea. Mary sails to England to volunteer for the war effort as a nurse but is turned down

1855 Mary makes her own way to Crimea, where she runs a restaurant and general store – which also acts as a drop-in clinic – until July 1856

June 1857

Mary's memoir, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands* (right), is published. The following month, a four-day military festival at the Royal Surrey Gardens raises money for the first Seacole Fund in Mary's aid

1859 Mary travels to Jamaica, returning to Panama the next year

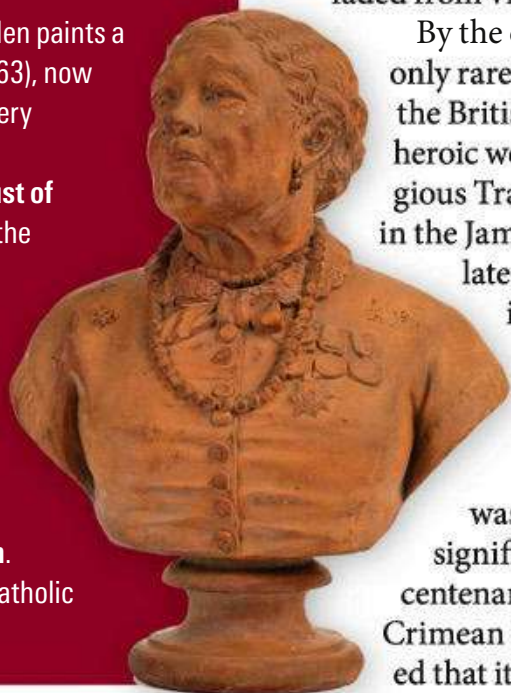
1865 Back in England, Mary is working privately as a masseur and herbalist offering her "specific" for cholera during the 1866 epidemic

1869 Albert Charles Challen paints a portrait of Mary (see page 63), now in the National Portrait Gallery

1872 Count Gleichen's bust of Mary (right) is exhibited at the Royal Academy

1876 Mary returns to Jamaica for a couple of years

14 May 1881 Mary Seacole dies in Paddington. She is buried in St Mary's Catholic Cemetery at Kensal Green



in her memoir she emphasises her Scottishness above her Jamaican ethnicity – an aspect of her character that we cannot dismiss. "I am only a little brown," she insists in *Wonderful Adventures*, "a few shades duskier than the brunettes whom you all admire so much." Some commentators today feel that, by attempting to downplay her colour and ethnicity, Seacole was selling out to the white establishment. But in 1850s Britain, there was a considerable incentive for her to stress the white part of her family heritage to her target market.

Retreat into obscurity

From the late 1850s until her death in London in 1881, Mary Seacole's fortunes were mixed. During this time, she spent two periods back in Jamaica trying to repair her financial affairs. It is my belief, based on extensive research, that in the second half of the 1860s she operated privately in London as a holistic practitioner/masseur to the military top brass and royal patrons she had cultivated during the war. Even with such august supporters, though, she slipped out of the public eye.

Her final burst of press attention came when a terracotta bust of her created by Count Gleichen was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1872. Of three copies made, one sold at auction in July 2020 for the astonishing sum of £101,000. Yet in 2003, when I checked the original album of Gleichen's sculptures at the National Portrait Gallery, the photograph of this bust had been labelled merely "an old Jamaican lady", indicating the degree to which she had been forgotten.

When Seacole died, in May 1881, she was accorded a brief obituary that was syndicated across the British and some of the colonial press; one newspaper noted that she had "died in a retirement so complete that it amounted to oblivion". There were no reports of her funeral and, from that point, Mary faded from view.

By the end of the century, one finds only rare passing mentions of her in the British press, a couple of books on heroic women produced by the Religious Tract Society in the 1900s, and in the Jamaican *Daily Gleaner* in the late 1930s. She resurfaced again in 1958, when a hall of residence at the University of the West Indies in Kingston was named after her.

In the UK press, though, she was not mentioned again in any significant way until 1954 – the centenary of Britain's entry into the Crimean War – when *The Times* suggested that it was "a pity that the work of this

Seacole was accorded a brief obituary; at least one newspaper noted that she had "died in a retirement so complete that it amounted to oblivion"

good and skilful nurse should be forgotten. Seacole's efforts in Crimea, the paper went on, "might serve as a great example to the many West Indian nurses who now receive a better training than Mrs Seacole". Many of these would have been members of the *Windrush* generation who had arrived in the UK from 1948 to work in the newly created National Health Service.

It is easy to suggest that Seacole's disappearance from the record after 1881 was the product of Victorian racism. However, that idea underestimates the extraordinary level of love and admiration that she had enjoyed among Crimean veterans, particularly the rank and file. They truly respected and cherished her, and they did not forget her.

As these old soldiers died, though, their shared oral memory of her many kindnesses and nursing skills largely died with them. That lacuna is compounded by the fact that Seacole left no archive, bar the basic census records, her death registration, her will and four known letters written by her, of which only two are manuscript. Nor are there any diaries. Her collection of glowing testimonials from the war has not survived, nor has any written record of her holistic recipes.

To compensate for this absence of evidence, the digitisation of Victorian newspapers over the past 20 years has revealed a wealth of reporting on Seacole's exploits in Crimea from 1855–56, and regular mentions of her up till 1867 and the second Seacole Fund campaign to raise money for her, advertised across the British press. Press databases also yield sightings in the fallow years between 1868 and Seacole's death in 1881.

Any biographer will tell you that the first principle of the discipline is never, ever to trust what the subject of an autobiography says about themselves. The journalist and



Truly respected

A photograph of Mary Seacole, holding pestle and mortar, possibly taken for a fundraising gala for her held in 1857



Next generation

Florence Nightingale (centre), pictured in 1886 surrounded by nurses from the training school she established at St Thomas' Hospital following her return from Crimea. In contrast with some modern commentators, Mary Seacole never compared herself to Nightingale

Mary Seacole

historian Simon Heffer wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*, “A biographer cannot know everything: it is his or her responsibility to fill in gaps – not by invention, but by conjecture informed by deep knowledge of the subject.”

In the case of Mary Seacole, there are numerous gaps in the narrative that, even after 20 years of research, I have not been able to fill. There is no getting around the dearth of genealogical evidence relating to her life and her marriage to Edwin Seacole. The American abolitionist Frederick Douglass once observed that: “Genealogical trees do not flourish among slaves.” Seacole had, of course, been a free woman; nonetheless, genealogical sources for black and formerly enslaved people in Jamaica are thin. In addition, Seacole deliberately withheld facts from her shockable Victorian audience: notably, the common-law relationship of her parents, and the existence of half-siblings and her own illegitimate daughter.

Such gaps in the record create a minefield for those trying to chronicle Seacole’s life up to the age of 45 and, in part, explain why so much hagiography has crept in. Internet sources tend to be cavalier in their treatment of the “facts” of Seacole’s life, and often report her own words, as printed in her memoir, as gospel without seeking to verify them.

Invention usurps accuracy

In the modern-day retelling of her story, invention often usurps factual accuracy, with a considerable amount of wishful thinking injected into what is known about Seacole’s life and, more importantly, her reputation as a nurse. This has led some detractors to question whether she was, in fact, a nurse as we understand the word today – undoubtedly the most contested part of Seacole’s reputation. Her most vocal critic, Nightingale scholar Lynn McDonald, contests that Seacole was primarily a sutler – a purveyor of food and drink – who did “little actual nursing in the Crimea”. This accusation is not borne out by the wealth of eyewitness testimony that I found.

McDonald’s discomfort, and that of other Seacole critics, is rooted in Seacole’s descriptions of her various business activities in her vivid memoir. This aspect of her life is often downplayed in an attempt to aggrandise her nursing exploits, but Seacole herself had no inhibitions about describing her desire to make a good living. She prided herself on being a self-starting entrepreneur, sutler, caterer – call her what you will – but that was only one facet of the woman she was. Her humanitarian instincts and care for others always came first.

In the late 1990s, controversy over Seacole



In Seacole’s steps

Student nurses from Jamaica, London and Trinidad in 1954, when *The Times* cited Mary Seacole as “a great example to the many West Indian nurses”

Seacole had no inhibitions about describing her desire to make a good living – she prided herself on being a self-starting entrepreneur



Medical memorial

The statue of Mary Seacole at St Thomas’ Hospital, London, unveiled in 2016. After decades of obscurity, her efforts are now widely celebrated

and her true achievements came to a head, when some members of Unison, a union representing nurses, suggested that Nightingale was no longer an appropriate figurehead for the new millennium and should perhaps be replaced by a new role model such as Mary Seacole. The suggestion sparked a debate that grew louder during fundraising for the Mary Seacole statue, unveiled at St Thomas’ Hospital in 2016. Many took offence at what they deemed the inappropriate location – on Nightingale’s home turf, as it were.

Today, dissent between the opposing camps – Seacole v Nightingale admirers – reflects a growing unease that, as the author Guy Walters noted, “the adulation of Seacole has gone too far”. Seacole’s achievements have, Walters argued, been “hugely oversold for political reasons, and out of a commendable – but in this case misguided – desire to create positive black role models”.

The irony is that Mary Seacole never promoted herself in the inflated ways in which she is sometimes represented today. She had her time in the sun, and enjoyed every minute of it. Though it might be unfashionable now, she was a proud patriot who wanted nothing more than to serve “queen and country” and her “sons” of the British Army. She had been, she knew, “the right woman” in the “right place”, who had offered comfort and succour to the sick and wounded in the truly humanitarian and “motherly” sense – and she was more than content with that accolade. **H**

Helen Rappaport is a historian and author. Her latest book is *In Search of Mary Seacole: The Making of a Cultural Icon* (Simon & Schuster, 2022)



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Mirroring multicultural B



Trailblazing talent

American singer Elizabeth Welch (shown top, c1935) and the African-American double act Buck and Bubbles (AKA Ford L Washington and John W Sublett) were part of a coterie of entertainers of colour who broadcast on the BBC in the 1930s

// The BBC's first black producer said her time there had been 'an exciting dream' that 'ended in a nightmare' //

From its inception the BBC has featured entertainers of colour, but they were often reduced to “exotic” attractions. **DAVID HENDY** explores how the corporation tried to include diverse voices, from the 1930s to the postwar years



In the spring of 1941, the 36-year-old Jamaican writer Una Marson was offered a job as staff producer at the BBC. It seemed a watershed moment for Britain's national broadcaster. A full seven years before the *Empire Windrush* docked at Tilbury, bringing nearly 500 British citizens from the Caribbean to their “Mother Country”, the corporation was opening up one of its much-sought-after editorial posts to a woman of colour. Yet by the time Marson left her job – in deeply troubling circumstances – less than six years later, she had every reason to conclude that the BBC's commitment to racial equality had much further to go.

The BBC had never been exclusively white – on the airwaves, at least. In the 1930s, the Guyanese bandleader Rudolph Dunbar had made numerous appearances on the wireless with what the *Radio Times* called his “Coloured Orchestra”. The singer Elisabeth Welch had her own series, *Soft Lights and Sweet Music*, while many other music programmes featured what were billed as “Negro spirituals”. As for television, the African-American double-act “Buck and Bubbles” were among the stars of Alexandra Palace's opening night in November 1936.

What's striking in this list of names is that it consists entirely of entertainers – people presented largely as “exotic” attractions. And despite a formidable CV that included publishing poetry and running a literary magazine, Una Marson had also been treated as an exotic – even problematic – presence in the BBC workplace. Before installing her in post, managers at the Overseas Service had thought it prudent to check with the

Colonial Office in Whitehall that “there would be no objection on their part to our appointment of a coloured British subject”. Her arrival was described – by broadcasters and civil servants alike – as an “experiment”.

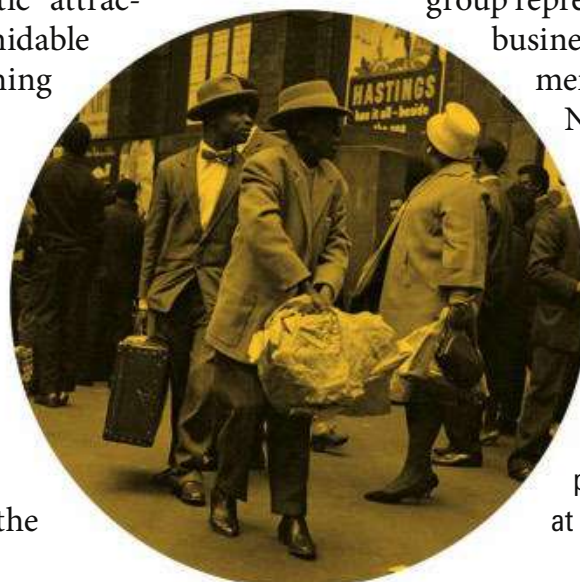
It was an experiment that discomfited some colleagues. Joan Gilbert, who helped run the Overseas Service's wartime variety department, often grumbled about her new producer's alleged “bad manners”. Gilbert complained: “Quite frankly, I wouldn't let anybody speak to me in the way Una does, and certainly not a coloured woman.”

It's hard to reconcile this with the glowing report provided by the BBC's staff training school. Marson, the report stated, possessed “imagination, appreciation of the audience, political judgment, and a sense of style and a feeling for language”. If there was a problem, it was not with Marson herself. “As the only ‘coloured’ producer in the BBC, she needs a good deal of backing to enable her to use her abilities to the best advantage, and to overcome the prejudices which undoubtedly exist among some of the staff,” the report continued.

To the BBC's credit, Marson did have the backing of senior management. Both John Grenfell Williams, the director of the African Service, and JB Clark, the wartime controller of the Overseas Service, came to her defence when the West India Committee – a lobby

group representing white-owned business interests – grumbled menacingly about her.

Nevertheless, the daily grind of racial prejudice took its toll. By 1945, she was experiencing a



People arriving from the West Indies to start new lives in the UK, 1962. The BBC broadcast programmes aimed specifically at listeners from the region



Oceans away

Una Marson holds the microphone for Jamaican technicians to record messages home, 1942. Such speeches were broadcast on *Calling the West Indies*

nervous breakdown; within months, she'd been diagnosed with schizophrenia and detained in hospital, where doctors claimed she had "delusions" of persecution.

The BBC decided there was no option but to assist Marson back to Jamaica so that she could benefit from a "home environment". On 14 October 1946 she was driven to Swansea docks, where, in a state of distress, she was forced aboard a ship bound for Kingston. The years she'd spent at the BBC, she later wrote, had been "an exciting dream" that had "ended in a nightmare".

Conversing with the colonies

Though her career had been cut short, Una Marson had every reason to be proud of what she'd done for the corporation. She's remembered now for launching *Caribbean Voices*, a series that continued almost uninterrupted until 1958 and established itself as a vital source of patronage for countless Caribbean authors. Before this, Marson had produced and presented another Overseas Service programme, *Calling the West Indies*. Broadcast four times a week, it featured heart-

from the thousands of men and women who had left the Caribbean to come and work for the Allied cause in Britain.

It wasn't the kind of series to raise the ugly issue of racism, a phenomenon by no means absent in 1940s Britain. But in creating a personable two-way conversation between the imperial metropole and one of the colonies, *Calling the West Indies* was a striking example of the BBC adapting to the urgent demands of wartime diplomacy. Back in 1932, the Empire Service had provided a slice of "old Britain" to expat communities in the colonies and dominions. Now, though, a stream of foreign broadcasters – from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India, the US and the African continent – were turning up in London with a different goal in mind: to help the BBC speak in a more collaborative voice with Britain's overseas allies.

The result was a subtle but important cultural shift. George Ivan Smith, from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, spoke of finding an institution that he had once imagined as parochial and stiff to be far more "open" than he expected – keen, in fact, to learn from its new recruits. This was, he

decided, a BBC becoming a global broadcaster in more than one respect: not just beaming its programmes around the world, but also increasingly cosmopolitan at home.

Tunnel vision

At first, very little of this new-found cosmopolitanism washed over into programmes destined for domestic audiences. By the close of the 1950s, some 300,000 people had made their way across the Atlantic from the Caribbean. But if the "immigrant experience" was covered on radio or television within Britain, the focus was mostly on instances of racial tension. Investigative reports such as *The Conflict of Cultures*, broadcast in 1952, may have been well-intentioned in their attempts to expose white prejudice. But they also reduced the richness of black British life to little more than a "problem" viewed from the outside.

Harman Grisewood, who'd begun his career as an announcer in Savoy Hill and ended it in the 1960s as the director-general's chief aide, once said that the work of the BBC was only half-done if it merely reflected faithfully "what goes on and what motivates

the present-day world". Programmes, he said, also needed to show listeners and viewers other ways of being – to "discriminate in favour of what is vital".

When it came to discriminating in favour of a multicultural world, there were soon glimmers of hope. John Elliot's screenplay *A Man from the Sun*, shown in 1956, represented a refreshing departure for the BBC by exploring racial prejudice entirely from an immigrant family's perspective. Then in 1964, the veteran features producer Geoffrey Bridson collaborated with the Harlem poet Langston Hughes to create a sprawling 19-part series for the Third Programme celebrating African-American culture – motivated, he said, by the desire to challenge racial attitudes at home. It was in 1964, too, that the BBC began making shows especially for immigrants from the Indian sub-continent.

If the BBC was at last beginning to reflect a multicultural Britain, progress had been horribly slow and uneven: its international output had set a pace that services for domestic audiences had failed to match. As for Una Marson, by 1964 her health had improved enough for her to visit London. Yet she never returned to the BBC's airwaves, and died the following year. Her remarkable broadcasting abilities were under-used until the end. **H**

David Hendy is emeritus professor at the University of Sussex. His latest book is *The BBC: A People's History* (Profile, 2022)

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Pioneering perspective A scene from the 1956 TV play *A Man from the Sun*. This was among the first BBC programmes to present racial prejudice solely from the viewpoint of an immigrant family



Successful showcase George Lamming, a poet and author from Barbados, appears on *Caribbean Voices* in 1951. The programme was "at the centre of a thriving new literary scene"

IN FOCUS How *Caribbean Voices* put rising stars from the West Indies on the map

The literary and cultural historian Clair Wills recently wrote that, for aspiring immigrant writers in 1950s Britain, "the central character in almost all accounts of day-to-day life was the BBC". If so, one reason for this unlikely relationship was *Caribbean Voices*, the radio series established in 1943 by Una Marson and edited for many years by her successor, the Irishman Henry Swanzy.

The idea for *Caribbean Voices* had first come to Marson when fellow producer George Orwell invited her on to his own talks programme, *Voice*, and she found herself sharing the microphone with writers Mulk Raj Anand, William Empson

and TS Eliot. Marson's timely reinvention of Orwell's series began as a small segment within *Calling the West Indies*. But it quickly blossomed into a thriving showcase of its own for Caribbean authors who were either unknown or only just beginning to establish an international reputation. Louise Bennett,

Sam Selvon, VS Naipaul, George Lamming and Derek Walcott were just some of those who appeared regularly.

Una Marson was a Jamaican literary figure in her own right; Swanzy was an outsider. But the Irishman was adept at providing a supportive environment for West Indian writers who had come to Britain to make a living – not just getting them on air but helping them forge valuable social connections. Under him, the programme was at the centre of a thriving new literary scene linking London with the Caribbean.

As for its effect on broadcasting, a significant feature of *Caribbean Voices* was the emphasis that it placed not just on what writers said but on how they said it. The powerfully expressive style that a writer such as Louise Bennett used when reading her work was a marked departure from the polite restraint with which most scripts were delivered on the BBC's airwaves. Though the series ended in 1958, the fresh, vernacular style that it pioneered would soon be heard more widely across British radio.

// The powerfully expressive style was a marked departure from the polite restraint with which most scripts were delivered //

Why didn't the ancient Greeks
or Romans wear trousers?

How did they shave?

How much wine did they drink?

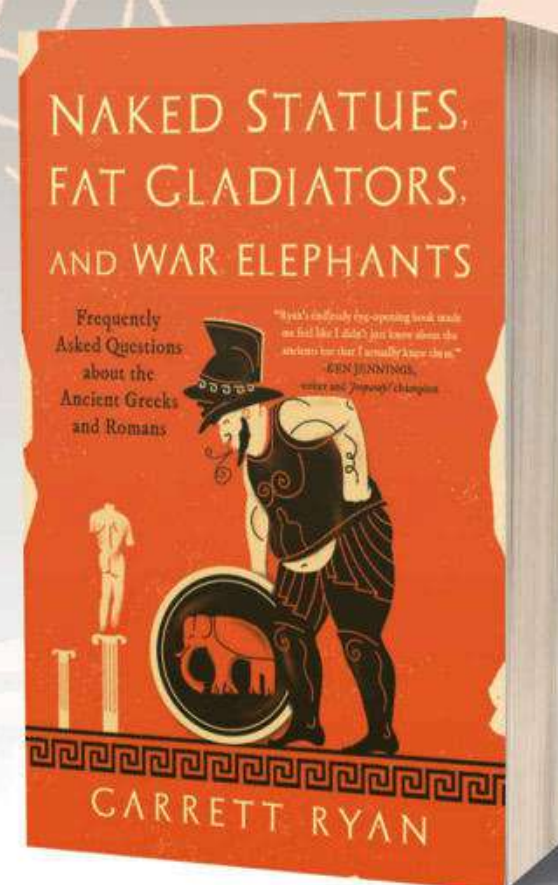
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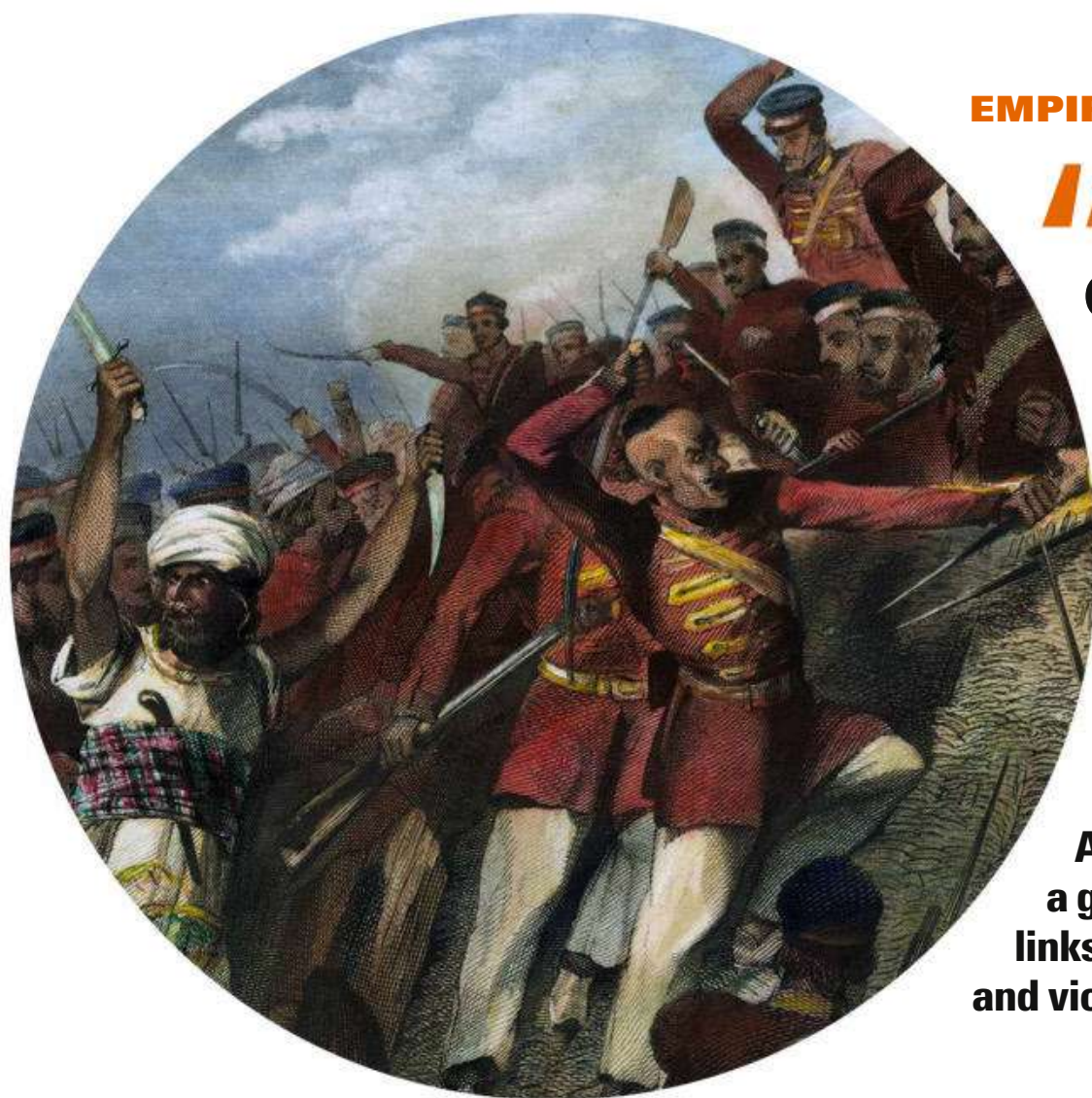
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BOOKS

TUDOR

“Hunter offers a tantalising glimpse into Mary’s world through the textiles that surrounded her”

Nicola Tallis appraises an innovative life of Mary, Queen of Scots > page 83



EMPIRE

// The catalogue of violence is unrelenting, ranging from warfare on every scale to intricate tortures //

Alex von Tunzelmann considers a global study of the deep-rooted links between the British empire and violence > page 80

WW2

“Glamorous heroes of the resistance smuggled intelligence to the Allies and sabotaged trains”

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INTERWAR

“Dunn traces the lives, loves and obsessions of a coterie of intellectuals in interwar Oxford”

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INTERVIEW

Christopher de Bellaigue reflects on the Ottoman sultan Suleyman > page 76



INTERVIEW / CHRISTOPHER DE BELLAIGUE

"Suleyman was just as bellicose as his father, if not as gratuitously cruel"

CHRISTOPHER DE BELLAIGUE talks to Rhiannon Davies about his book charting the early years of Suleyman the Magnificent's reign, when the sultan had to navigate the deadly machinations of the Ottoman court as well as battle Christian powers

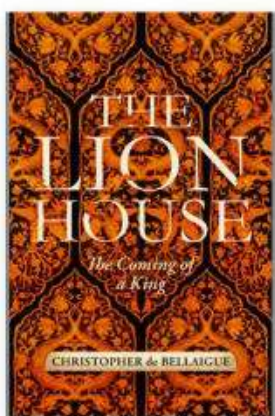


Rhiannon Davies: How did Suleyman the Magnificent become sultan of the Ottoman empire – the 10th man to hold that title?

Christopher de Bellaigue: Suleyman had a very easy rise to the sultanate because his father, Selim – known as “the Grim” – had no compunction about killing. Everyone else who could have become sultan had been dispatched. There was a tradition that had become law under Mehmed the Conqueror, Suleyman’s great-grandfather, by which the Ottoman sultan could kill brothers and sons in order to ease the passage to the sultanate of a particular favoured son or brother. And, indeed, Suleyman benefited from this tradition – Selim killed several brothers and nephews and, however many sons he may have had, only Suleyman was allowed to survive.

Suleyman came to power in 1520, after his father had ruled for a very short of period of time. During his reign, Selim had almost doubled the extent of Ottoman territory – he defeated the Iranians, captured Egypt and gained control of the Holy Land. Under him, the Ottomans went from being a large power with a very significant European presence to a much larger power with a more Eurasian identity.

Selim then died very unexpectedly, possibly of the plague, and Suleyman came to power unopposed. His accession was greeted with enormous relief by the European powers – and by Christendom as a whole – because the Christian powers were in enormous terror of Selim, and thought that Suleyman could only be an improvement.



**The Lion House:
The Coming
of a King**
by Christopher
de Bellaigue
(The Bodley Head,
304 pages, £20)

In what ways did the threat of violence hang over Suleyman’s relationship with his father?

We get a strong sense from the chronicles at the time that on the few occasions the grown-up Suleyman met his father, it was always very precarious. One didn’t quite know which way the meetings would go. As a sultan approached old age, he was very vulnerable to a son who might topple him – indeed, Selim had done that very thing to his own father, Bayezid. If you treat your royal father that way, then you’re going to fear your royal son.

Equally, the royal son is also going to fear that his father might take against him. There’s a story about this perilous relationship that illustrates the point. When Suleyman was crown prince, he was sent a lavish gown as a gift, seemingly from his father. It arrived at

Manisa, where Suleyman was learning the ropes of administration with his mother, Hafsa – a formidable woman. The gown was absolutely splendid, but Hafsa said: “Hold on, don’t put that on. We’ll give it to an attendant first.” As it turned out, the gown was poisoned and the poor attendant died shortly thereafter – but Suleyman was spared that grisly fate.

Just how powerful was Suleyman as sultan?

The idea of Suleyman the all-powerful (as opposed to the puppet in the hands of his courtiers) is something that’s absolutely fascinating to me. Was he, as his long list of titles suggested, really the Master of the Celestial Conjunction and the Vice Regent of God on Earth, or was he simply a man in thrall to conniving courtiers?

He came to power with a young companion called Ibrahim, who was almost exactly the same age. Ibrahim was a Venetian citizen who had been sold into slavery as a boy and purchased by an elderly widow. She taught him lots of things, such as languages and literature and how to play musical instruments – all the accomplishments suitable for a young man of ambition. Ibrahim then came into Suleyman’s inner circle after being presented to the crown prince by the widow in question, and the two men became extremely close; indeed, the Venetian ambassadors suggested that they were lovers. At any rate, they had a very intense relationship.

When Suleyman succeeded to the throne, he came to Istanbul to take up the powers left to him by his father. The existing pashas (high-ranking officials) were all waiting for him, rubbing their hands and saying: “Well, there’s a young chap here, we’re going to control him.” But it wasn’t one man who arrived but two. So now the pashas were asking themselves: “Who is this Ibrahim? He’s just a slave who’s come out of nowhere. Why is our new lord so dependent on him?”

Ibrahim is a very, very interesting historical figure. He came from nowhere but was highly intelligent, very charming, very accomplished in so many ways. And Suleyman, I think, lacked self-confidence. He felt isolated, surrounded by his father’s men in an alien environment, so he leaned ever more heavily on Ibrahim. In 1523, he took the unprecedented step of promoting Ibrahim to grand vizier – the first grand vizier in the history of the Ottoman empire who had in no way proven himself either on the battlefield or in administration.

So did Ibrahim start to rival Suleyman?

As time went on, Ibrahim became more and more well-known across Europe, and took control of foreign policy, particularly diplomacy. The Venetians certainly adored him, because he spoke Italian and was a Venetian citizen, and he loved their presents – he was a big fan of Venetian bling. All of this gave Ibrahim great influence.



PROFILE

Christopher de Bellaigue is an investigative journalist and author who has covered the Middle East and south Asia extensively. His books include *The Islamic Enlightenment* (The Bodley Head, 2017), *Patriot of Persia* (The Bodley Head, 2012) and *Rebel Land* (Bloomsbury, 2010)

PHOTOGRAPH BY
FRAN MONKS

By the early 1530s, when he was really at his pomp, we have some wonderful descriptions of Ibrahim's conversations with Habsburg ambassadors in which he boasted about the power he had over the sultan. Basically he said: "If I tell the sultan to do something, he does it. And if he wants to do something and I want to do something else, inevitably it is the thing that I want done that will be done. So don't think that he's holding the power – I'm the one with the real power."

That was how the relationship between Ibrahim and Suleyman evolved. It started off with Suleyman appointing him, then probably went through a period of equality and then, towards the end, you get the sense that Ibrahim was usurping his master's position.

How does your book's title, *The Lion House*, relate to the two men's relationship?

At the heart of Istanbul (then widely known as Constantinople) was the Byzantine hippodrome, near which Suleyman built his palace. At the entrance to the hippodrome was a menagerie, called the Lion House. It did contain lions; wild men were rumoured to be kept there, too. There were also elephants, which came out to meet the sultan when he returned from campaigns, and various other exotic animals.

Now, during the course of this evolving relationship between Ibrahim and Suleyman, there was a discussion of lions and lion tamers between Ibrahim and some foreign ambassadors. When Ibrahim was boasting about his power, he drew an analogy between the ruler and the man who is keeping him, and the lion and its keeper.

In Ibrahim's telling, the keeper of the lion house is obviously in fear of the lion because it is immensely strong. So he tosses the lion meat, and he holds a big stick in order to make the lion cringe, to lick it into shape and to discipline it. Remarkably, Ibrahim turned to his interlocutor and said: "The sultan is the lion, and I am the lion keeper."

You mentioned that Christian powers were relieved when Suleyman came to power. Did that remain the case?

No – because, very shortly after his succession, Suleyman marched deep into central southern Europe, to Belgrade, and took the city. He also seized Rhodes from the Knights Hospitaller, who had controlled that island for centuries. So Suleyman revealed himself to be just as bellicose and ambitious as his father, if not as gratuitously cruel.

// Suleyman and Charles V both commanded vast empires and had world ambitions. They were almost destined to fight each other //

Who was Suleyman's greatest opponent in Europe?

The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, of the Habsburg dynasty. Charles and Suleyman commanded two vast empires: Habsburg possessions stretched from the Baltic to the Atlantic, while Ottoman interests extended from Crimea to north Africa and farther east into Persia. Where these two arcs met was a place where they could fight – where they were almost destined to fight – because these were two men who had world ambitions.

Charles was crowned king of the Romans at Aachen in 1520 – the same year that Suleyman became sultan. Erasmus of Rotterdam wasn't the only person to see in this coincidence a sign of things to come, what he called a fraternal twinning of opposites.

Both men were bolstered by a sense of destiny, a sense of history. Charles was very much aware of the Crusades. When he was growing up, he used to dress his younger brother Ferdinand as a Turk, so they could play at the Crusades. Charles was desperate to retake Constantinople; its fall to the Ottomans in 1453 had dealt an enormous blow to Christendom's sense of security.

For Suleyman, a holy war to increase the domain of Islam was also a divine imperative. He dreamed of taking western Rome; he already had "eastern Rome" – Constantinople – and he thought it was his destiny to control both. Yet ironically enough, it was Charles V's troops that sacked Rome, in 1527.

Venice played off the two sides against one another in this Habsburg-Ottoman conflict. Why?

Venice was deeply insecure. It needed the Ottomans because they controlled the Mediterranean, on which the Venetians were utterly reliant – their ships needed to go from place to place, transporting



Empire builder A 16th-century illustration of Suleyman the Magnificent. The young sultan launched offensives into western Europe



Lion keeper Suleyman's friend and grand vizier, Ibrahim, c1530. The former slave was given great power by the sultan – and came to rival him



Imperial enemy Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, c1520. He and Suleyman became locked in a cycle of fighting and negotiating



Gateway to the west

Ottoman troops approach Vienna in this 1529 illustration. Although the Ottomans reached the walls, the town did not fall to the invaders

goods to and from Venice but also importing goods that would end up elsewhere in Europe. So they needed Ottoman goodwill. At the same time, the Venetians were Catholics, owing nominal allegiance to the pope. So they had to somehow remain Catholic, yet also remain friends of the Ottomans. They did this by suggesting to the rest of Christendom that they could perhaps moderate Ottoman aggression and provide intelligence.

On the one hand, the Habsburgs were very angry with the Venetians for being so close to Suleyman. On the other, Suleyman had suspicions of his own that the Venetians were not true allies and couldn't really be trusted.

One remarkable character emerged from this situation as a key figure: Alvise Gritti, son of the doge [chief magistrate and leader] of Venice, Andrea Gritti. He had been denied any chance of rising up the Venetian hierarchy because he was born out of wedlock, but the Ottomans had no such scruples, saying to him: "Come over and make your fortune in Istanbul."

Alvise is the embodiment of this double game. Just as he was telling the sultan: "I am your devoted servant," with the next breath he was telling his father, the doge, "I am *your* devoted servant." And for several years, he managed to pull this off, becoming fantastically rich in the process. He supplied grain to Venice, sent thoroughbred horses to northern Italy, and sold tin, gems and precious metals to the sultan. He was really animated by a profound ambition. Having been denied office in Venice, he thought: "I'll be bigger than Venice." [He was later killed when, having become effectively the Ottoman governor of Hungary, he overstretched himself in Transylvania and sparked a huge insurrection against his rule.]

GETTY IMAGES

How did Suleyman's rivalry with Charles V play out on the field?

Charles V was part of a double act. His sidekick was his younger brother, Ferdinand, who operated in central Europe. Ferdinand was very interested in Hungary, which saw much violence in the early years of Suleyman's reign.

The Ottomans launched several offensives into Hungary, the first of which resulted in the defeat of the Hungarian king Louis II in 1526, at the famous battle of Mohács. Ferdinand then regarded himself as the rightful ruler of Hungary, so that tussle continued.

The next time Suleyman's army marched west, in 1529, it was to launch an attack on Vienna. Though a relatively small town in those days, Vienna was undeniably important, regarded as the gateway to western Europe. Had it fallen, it is possible that the Ottomans would have been emboldened to continue even farther into western Europe. But Vienna did not fall; though the Ottomans reached its walls, it was heroically defended and, because the invaders had arrived relatively late in the year, the onset of winter favoured the defenders. So the Ottomans had to withdraw.

At that stage, the main setting for the rivalry changed to the Mediterranean – or the White Sea, as the Ottomans called it. That was when the pirate Hayreddin (known in the west as Barbarossa) became hugely important in the Ottoman empire. He was summoned to Istanbul and made head of the navy in 1533, scoring some notable successes in the Mediterranean.

Is it fair to say then that this period saw something of a stalemate between Suleyman and Charles V?

There was a moment in 1534 when the situation could have changed. For a brief period, Istanbul was undefended – Charles and Ferdinand could have gathered their forces and fleets then, and made for the city. That would have been one measure of victory in this contest for mastery of the world. But it didn't happen. Neither Suleyman nor Charles won, and both maintained that sense of wounded power. They continued to fight and to negotiate, and to fight and to negotiate.

Someone who certainly lost was Ibrahim. What happened to him?

Ibrahim's story is one of hubris, you won't be surprised to hear. He got too big for his boots, and made enemies within the Ottoman administration. One of those enemies was the finance minister, another fascinating individual called Iskender Çelebi, who was almost as brilliant as Ibrahim. After a calamitous campaign in Persia, for which Ibrahim was partly responsible, the grand vizier managed to pin the blame on Iskender – and Suleyman had Iskender executed in March 1535.

That night, Iskender came to Suleyman in a dream, wrapping his turban around the sultan's swan-like neck, pulling tighter and tighter. When the sultan woke from this nightmare, he made a vow that his grand vizier, the man who convinced him to kill a man unjustly, would not live another year.

After the armies returned to Istanbul, the sultan invited Ibrahim – as he very often did – to come to his palace to share *iftar* [the meal eaten after sunset during Ramadan] and stay the night. The following day, Ibrahim's body was discovered. He had clearly mounted a spirited defence against the sultan's assassins, but succumbed. His body was buried in an unmarked grave.

No announcement was made, but of course the news spread very quickly. And this episode marks the end of *The Lion House*. It occurred in 1536, at the end of the first third of Suleyman's reign. It was, in a way, the sultan's coming of age: the moment when Suleyman declared his independence – that he would not be dominated by anyone else for the rest of his reign. **H**

MORE FROM US

Listen to an extended version of this interview with Christopher de Bellaigue on our **podcast** at historyextra.com/podcast



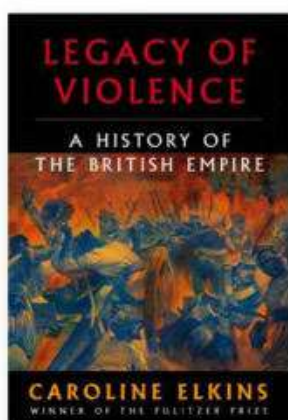
Bloody battle

Sepoys attack the Redan battery at Lucknow during the 1857 Indian Rebellion – one of many violent incidents in the history of the British empire

IMPERIAL

The brutish empire

ALEX VON TUNZELMANN considers a global investigation into the intrinsic connection between racialised violence and the history of the world's largest-ever empire



Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire

by Caroline Elkins
Bodley Head,
896 pages, £30

The British empire nominally ceased to exist in 1947, when

India and Pakistan became independent (though substantial imperial power endured well into the Commonwealth period). Even 75 years later, though, questions and

controversies about it are still rarely out of the news. Harvard professor Caroline Elkins is the latest historian to try to tell one aspect of its immense story. In the introduction, she declares: "My hope is that it [this book] will inform today's imperial history wars and struggles for racial equality, pushing debates over whether or not the British empire was a good or a bad thing, or better or worse than other imperial ventures, toward asking how and why the empire's past continues to shape the present."

It is an admirable aim to sidestep the culture wars and engage directly with the facts – but *Legacy of Violence* will probably upset

defenders of the British empire before they have even opened it. As its title suggests, the book views the whole history of empire through the lens of violence – in particular, racialised violence.

No doubt the defenders would rather view the empire through the rosier spectacles of what they consider to be its achievements: the railways, cricket, the rule of law, and so forth. By the end of this book, Elkins has smashed those spectacles to bits and ground their fragments into the mud. "Violence was not just the British empire's midwife," she asserts, "it was endemic to the structures and systems of British rule. It was not just an occasional

means to liberal imperialism's end; it was a means and an end for as long as the British empire remained alive."

The study of imperial violence is well established. Frantz Fanon's landmark *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) opened with a discussion of the violence of colonialism and the violence required to resist it. More recently, scholars such as Kim A Wagner, Mark Condos and Elizabeth Kolsky have produced fascinating studies of violence in the British and French empires. Elkins' own Pulitzer Prize-winning 2006 book *Imperial Reckoning* (published in the United Kingdom as *Britain's Gulag*) detailed British repression of the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya.

With *Legacy of Violence*, Elkins returns to the subject of imperial violence and its subsequent cover-up. This time, though, she widens her scope to the whole physical extent of British power – from the impeachment of Warren Hastings, British governor-general of Bengal, to the symbolic drowning of Edward Colston's statue in Bristol Harbour. Her target is "liberal imperialism", a term she uses to encompass any instinct towards defining empire as a "civilising mission" over the whole two-century span of the book.

To substantiate her core argument – that the British empire was inherently violent, and that violence was inherently linked with racism – Elkins takes examples from all over the globe. There are a lot of them, from the response to the Indian Rebellion of 1857 to the suppression of slave revolts in Jamaica; from the use of concentration camps in the Boer War to the brutality of the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries in Ireland; from the violent repression of Arab and Jewish insurgencies in the Middle East to the guerrilla war waged against the independence movement in Malaya. The catalogue of violence Elkins presents is unrelenting, ranging from warfare on every scale, to indiscriminate and discriminate slaughter, to intricately devised tortures.

Legacy of Violence must have been incredibly challenging to research and write, encompassing as it does more than 200 years of history and territories all over the world, each with its own unique complexities. There are already excellent histories of the empire in many of these territories, but the benefit of *Legacy of Violence* is that it draws them all together to build a picture of the consistencies and inconsistencies of British rule overall. It is fascinating to see the connections between these stories: officers of empire who appear in India and reappear in the Middle East, for instance, or Indian freedom fighters citing Sinn Féin as an inspiration.

Even a sympathetic reader may have some quibbles with this book. Few who are familiar with the history of the British empire would

dispute Elkins' claim that its hierarchy was racialised. Yet the book's characterisation of *how* it was racialised sometimes feels simplistic. "Skin colour became the mark of difference," Elkins writes. "Whites were at one end of civilisation's spectrum, blacks at the other. All other shades of humanity fell somewhere between, and skin pigment was the visible brand of cultural difference." Yet, as Elkins herself argues later, "In Victorian Britain, whiteness did not bestow, a priori, civilisation. As with the Afrikaners, Britain's racially ordered world not only depicted the Irish as inferior but at time dehumanised them with ape-like images."

A more nuanced, intersectional discussion at the beginning of this book of how race was constructed beyond pigment alone would not have undermined its argument that violence was racialised. If anything, it might have underpinned it even more firmly.

// The contention that violence in the British empire was exceptional, rather than endemic, cannot survive the evidence here //

Elkins succeeds, though, in her primary aim: to lay waste to the myth that the British empire was mostly peaceable and functional, apart from "a few bad apples". (Those who cite that proverb in defence of institutions typically omit the second half of it: "...spoil the whole barrel".) The idea that violence was exceptional, rather than endemic, in the British empire was articulated by Winston Churchill after the Amritsar massacre of 1919, which he described as "an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation". This contention has proved popular among defenders of empire, but it cannot survive the evidence here.

According to Elkins, we must not turn away from the painful parts of history "but instead, as I have sought to do, centre liberal imperialism's state-directed violence on its stage to see how and why Britain's empire helped shape the modern world". The result is a harrowing read, and one that brings the violence of empire sharply into focus. **H**

.....
Alex von Tunzelmann is the author of *Fallen Idols* (Headline, 2021)

AUTHORS ON THE PODCAST

Lloyd Bowen on a dramatic Jacobean duel

"This duel between two gentlemen in 1610 wasn't, in some ways, an extraordinary one. It came at a time when duelling was on the rise and was causing anxiety in England and Wales –



King James VI & I was exercised by the death of what he saw as the "noble blood" of the land because of the increase in duelling. So it was part of a growing trend – but what does make this duel very unusual is the wealth of evidence that surrounds it."

Victoria Finlay on the fascinating history of fabric

"Cotton started off as a luxury good in India, one of the goods that was traded with Indonesia. Then it went to Europe, where Pliny the Elder complained that the desire for fine cotton – muslin, really – was bankrupting the Roman coffers. Everybody wanted it. It was a really special cotton – it was very sexy, very sheer. He couldn't understand why people were paying so much for something that looked like so little."



Dominic Perring on London's Roman archaeology

"London was not a typical Roman city, but this makes it very instructive for us today. The city seems to have been driven by phases when emperors were particularly concerned



with winning prestige, keeping their army happy, or expansion. London's archaeological record, showing proactive periodic imperial involve-

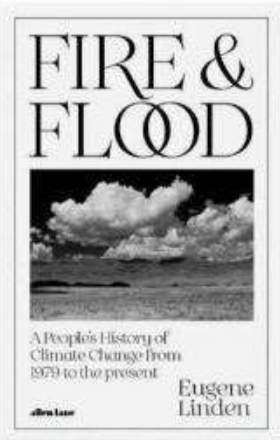
ment and investment, is a valuable source of information about what was happening in the Roman world."



ENVIRONMENT

One minute to midnight

JOHN FM CLARK appraises a hard-hitting study of contemporary climate change, exploring how science, business and public perception have become dangerously misaligned



**Fire and Flood:
A People's History
of Climate Change,
from 1979 to
the Present**
by Eugene Linden
Allen Lane, 336 pages, £20

Following the collapse of the eastern bloc in 1989, a number of commentators contended that the post-Cold War period should be considered the “Age of Environment”, because of the historically unprecedented scale and pace of human-generated environmental changes seen in the latter 20th century and into the early 21st. In his latest book on the contemporary history of climate change, veteran environmental journalist Eugene Linden cuts through the thickets of information to deftly guide the reader towards knowledge that is urgently required in this troubling age.

Linden systematically examines the history of climate change since 1979. Broken into decades, each part of his book is further divided into four strands – or “four different realms” running, potentially ruinously, on “four different clocks”. For each decade, he considers the following aspects of climate change: reality, or what actually happened geophysically to the planet; the state of scientific knowledge; public awareness (principally captured through opinion polls and the stated priorities of policymakers and politicians); and the actions of finance and industry.

Perhaps most sobering is Linden’s explication of the significant disconnect between the science of climate change and public perceptions. In 1993, *Nature* published definitive confirmation that one of the last great thousand-year coolings of the Earth started and ended abruptly. By 2003, there was a scientific consensus about recent human-generated climate change, and about the pace of the catastrophe that might ensue from this. Whereas once scientists believed that catastrophic climate change occurred over a period of 100 years, they now agreed that, once set in motion, it could happen in as little as a decade. Despite this startling scientific consensus, public perceptions of climate



Hell or high water Houses on Grand Lake in Canada are threatened by high flood waters encrusted with ice in 2019. Eugene Linden’s new book traces the history of climate change – and the dangers it poses to us today

change stubbornly stuck to a spectrum that ranged from disbelief to indifference to limited concern borne of a belief that climate change was a slow, incremental process. Linden very effectively explores the multifarious reasons for this disconnect between scientists and public perceptions.

Along the way, he considers the insidious effects of neoliberal values and economic policies as articulated by politicians and engineered by the realms of business and finance. For instance, Linden provides insights into the workings of the insurance

business, which has not introduced financial disincentives to the purchase and ownership of properties that are increasingly susceptible to catastrophic loss through fire and flood arising from climate change. Instead it has deployed annually renewed policies, or has left the state to assume the impending burden of these swelling environmental risks.

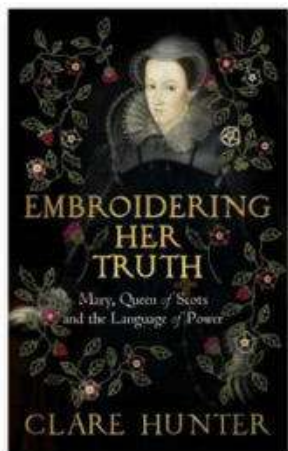
Historians are sometimes reluctant to engage with contemporary history. Some contend that only with the aid of significant hindsight can we ascend the lofty heights from which to properly survey the past. Fernand Braudel asserted that “events” were ephemeral dust when compared with the meaningful historical change that occurred over long, geological stretches of time. But, as Linden clearly demonstrates, climate change requires us to reset our clocks and to synchronise them across the realms of science, public perception, business and finance. Urgent action is required because unprecedented historical change might actually occur at the flick of a switch. **H**

John FM Clark is director of the Institute for Environmental History, University of St Andrews

// Despite startling scientific consensus, public perceptions of climate change stuck to a spectrum ranging from disbelief to indifference //

Stitch in time

NICOLA TALLIS commends a bold biography of Mary, Queen of Scots that uses textiles to tell the doomed monarch's story



Embroidering Her Truth

by Clare Hunter
Hodder & Stoughton,
416 pages, £20

The story of Mary, Queen of Scots is well-trodden territory for historians. She has long been a source of

fascination, her life often inspiring either sympathy or impatience. Given that most of the events of Mary's life and reign – from her religious policies to her relationship with Elizabeth I and her ultimately gruesome end – have been the subject of a plethora of modern scholarship, one might wonder which stone in her narrative could possibly remain unturned. But Clare Hunter's *Embroidering Her Truth* is no ordinary cultural biography of the Scottish queen, instead it explores the expression of female power through its wealth of material trappings and splendour.

Hunter fulfils her objective admirably. With her engaging style, she offers a tantalising glimpse into Mary's world through the prism of the textiles that surrounded her. These possessions, Hunter tells us, "represented a material encyclopaedia of Mary's past", and this book succeeds in projecting them vividly in the mind's eye.

Throughout the book, Hunter's passion, knowledge and

Dressed to impress

Mary, Queen of Scots in a c1558–60 painting. Her sumptuous textiles are the focus of a new book by Clare Hunter

experience of working with textiles shine through. Combined with the rich supply of details offered by the treasurer's accounts of the period – a seemingly underutilised source – they add a generous splash of colour to Mary's world.

Outward display was of the greatest importance in the 16th century, providing both monarchs and nobility with a crucial way to showcase their wealth and grandeur. Charting the course of Mary's life chronologically, *Embroidering Her Truth* demonstrates how textiles were used to communicate not just power but also emotion; they were designed not only to be seen but also to "be interpreted and experienced". This was certainly true in Mary's everyday life. From the earliest days of her childhood, she was clothed in the most luxurious of fabrics and surrounded by them in the décor of the French chateaux in which she was raised. Even her dolls were splendidly dressed.

Textiles were also used to full effect to project magnificence on ceremonial occasions. At the baptism of Mary's son James in 1566, for example, the fabrics employed were an important element – a visual celebration of the continuation of her bloodline. And the following year, textiles played a role in the aftermath of the murder of Mary's second husband, Lord Darnley.

In a different vein, the embroideries Mary stitched weren't merely a way of whiling away the 19 years of her English captivity. She used them as a tangible method of expressing her thoughts and feelings, and to impart messages with meanings not always fully understood to this day. And when the material trappings that Mary clung to as a mark of her queenship – notably the embroidered canopy of her chair of state – were removed, it was a palpable sign of her fall and ultimate doom.

Telling the story of a popular figure in a new way is a challenge, but Hunter's approach of memoir blended with history and material culture captivates the reader from the first page and enthralls to the last. *Embroidering Her Truth* is unique, bound to fascinate lovers of Tudor and textile history alike. **H**

.....
Nicola Tallis is the author of *Crown of Blood: The Deadly Inheritance of Lady Jane Grey* (Michael O'Mara, 2016)

YOU RECOMMEND

We asked our Twitter followers to recommend their favourite books on **ancient history**...

@Fullard

There are so many to recommend, but my favourite history book of all time is *Rubicon*, by Tom Holland. For those who like this period of history [the Roman Republic], it's also worth reading Robert Harris's fiction trilogy about the life of Cicero (*Imperium*, *Lustrum* and *Dictator*).

@vamottram

Searching for the Lost Tombs of Egypt by Chris Naunton (pictured) was one of the most exciting and tantalising ancient history books I've ever read. It made me realise there's still so much to discover, even after two centuries of excavation.



@DiogoMorg

Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* is a classic – and rightly so. For an excellent fictional take on the same conflict, I recommend Steven Pressfield's *Tides of War*.

@RolandButter13

Foundations of Christianity by Karl Kautsky – an excellent analysis of how this world religion started. It examines the economic and political shifts that generated enormous change, creating new ideas and benefits.

@BookshHistorian

I'm currently reading *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome* by Mary Beard. Balanced and relatively objective, it's been fascinating to learn more about ancient Rome and the myths surrounding it.

@JonnyGough

For an entry-level series, try the *Oxford Very Short Introductions* – for example, the books about ancient Assyria, Babylonia and the ancient Near East. There's also an excellent novel about ancient Assyria by Paul Cooper, called *All Our Broken Idols*.

@Calum59

Travel in the Ancient World by Lionel Casson. Superb, accessible and informative.

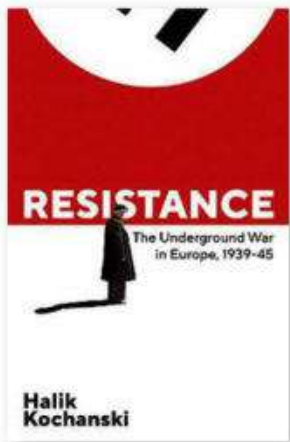


ALAMY

SECOND WORLD WAR

Courage under occupation

KEITH LOWE assesses a sweeping study of resistance to Axis powers in occupied Europe, from celebrated figures who undertook spying and sabotage to smaller, anonymous acts of defiance



Resistance: The Underground War in Europe, 1939-1945

by Halik Kochanski
Penguin, 960 pages, £35

In 1943, Polish resistance fighter Jan Nowak was on his way back from a secret meeting in Warsaw

when he was stopped in the street by a Gestapo agent. The policeman demanded to know where Nowak had just been, so he pointed to the first thing he saw: the brass plate for a dentist's surgery on the door next to him. Suspicious, the German agent rang the doorbell to confirm Nowak's story. When the dentist came to the door she did not hesitate for a second: even though she had never seen him before, she immediately confirmed that Nowak was her patient, and the Gestapo agent reluctantly let him go.

Resistance to Axis forces in occupied Europe came in all shapes and sizes. There was the glamorous kind, as practised by famous heroes such as Nowak – an astonishingly brave fighter and courier – which involved smuggling intelligence to the Allies, sabotaging trains or attacking German troops. Then there was the quiet, spontaneous kind, like that of the unknown dentist – perhaps more mundane, but without it Nowak's heroics would have been impossible.

In her new book, Halik Kochanski describes resistance in its myriad forms. Best known as an expert on Polish history, here she widens her canvas to include the whole of occupied Europe. In doing so, she draws revealing comparisons and contrasts between one country and another. For example, every country began its journey towards mass resistance by the printing of newspapers and propaganda posters; without first winning over hearts and minds, the mass movements of 1944 and 1945 would have been impossible.

The German response in each part of Europe was, though, very different. In France, being caught with resistance propaganda meant an immediate prison sentence. In Poland, it was punishable by death. Bearing

that point in mind, the behaviour of that quick-thinking Polish dentist becomes much braver than it at first appears.

Rather than organising the book by country, though, Kochanski structures it thematically and chronologically. She starts with the lower levels of resistance that characterised the beginning of the occupation: the setting up of printing presses, the gathering of intelligence, and the repeated mistakes that led to resisters being caught. She continues with the episodes such as the Holocaust and the expansion of forced labour programmes that

encouraged more people to join the cause. And she ends with the mass uprisings of the final war years and their bitter aftermath.

Along the way, she discusses the moral dilemmas that faced local populations everywhere. At what point did occupation become so unbearable that it was worth putting one's family at risk to fight it? Who was the greater enemy – the Germans or their local collaborators? Was it permissible to help the Nazis if it prevented the communists from taking power – or vice versa?

This is a general history, so Kochanski does not always have room for the detailed stories of individual heroism that made *The Eagle Unbowed*, her 2012 book about wartime Poland, so riveting. And though the Germans are the common denominator through most of the text, there is nothing here about resistance within Germany itself. Nevertheless, this is an excellent comparative study of wartime resistance in all its forms. **H**

Keith Lowe is the author of *Prisoners of History: What Monuments to the Second World War Tell Us About Our History and Ourselves* (William Collins, 2020)

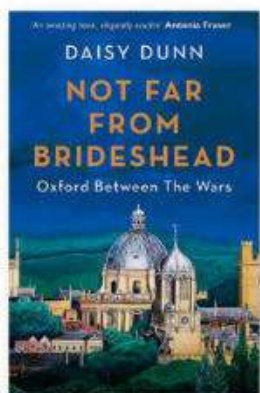
// In France, being caught with resistance propaganda meant an immediate prison sentence. In Poland, it was punishable by death //



Freedom fighters Members of the French resistance gather on the streets of Paris during an uprising against the Nazis, August 1944. Opposition to Axis forces burgeoned in every corner of occupied Europe

INTERWAR

Inside the ivory tower

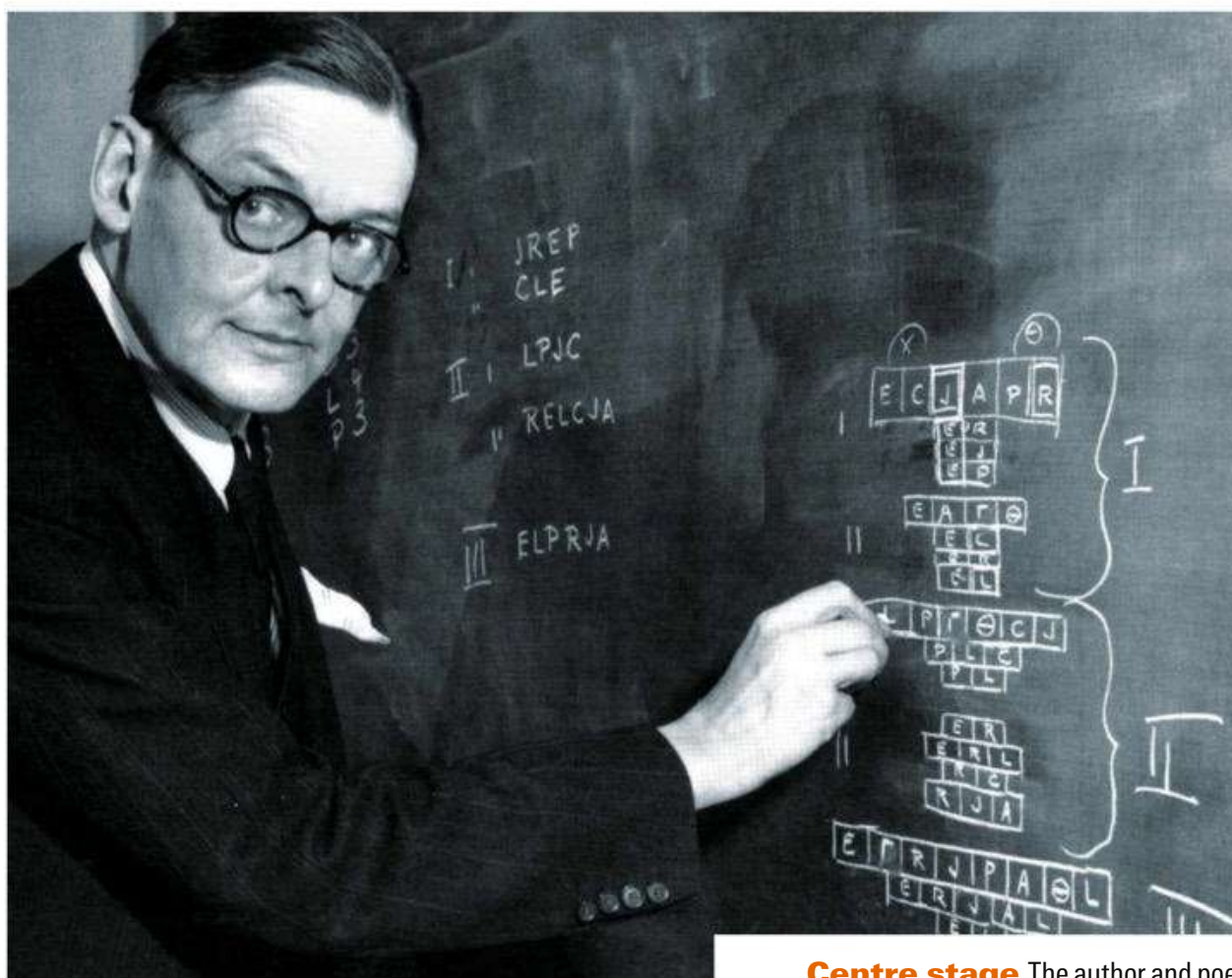


Not Far From Brideshead: Oxford Between the Wars
by Daisy Dunn
Weidenfeld & Nicolson,
304 pages, £20

Reverend William Archibald Spooner was warden of New College,

Oxford in 1919 when Maurice Bowra – who went on to become an esteemed classical scholar and warden of Wadham College – came up for his first term. Bowra joined other students who gathered beneath the warden’s window in the hope of overhearing an authentic “Spoonerism”. (Spooner lent his name to the habit of accidentally mixing up consonants in everyday speech, for example by accusing students of “tasting the whole worm” when they had been wasting the whole term.) Such episodes sparkle throughout this endlessly fascinating account, by classicist Daisy Dunn, of the lives, loves and obsessions of a coterie of scholars, poets and intellectuals in interwar Oxford.

Bowra features heavily, as does classical scholar Gilbert Murray, whom George Bernard Shaw satirised in his 1905 play *Major Barbara*. Murray married Lady Mary Henrietta Howard, daughter of the radical Countess of Carlisle; at one point he almost found himself the owner of Castle Howard (he and Lady



Centre stage The author and poet TS Eliot draws a diagram to show how a play should be structured, c1943. He is one of many famous academics to feature in Daisy Dunn’s new study of interwar Oxford

Mary declined the offer, being unable to wrench themselves entirely from Oxford’s dreaming spires).

Castle Howard was famously the setting of an adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited* and, naturally, that novel’s author, Evelyn Waugh, also features here, as do other writers including TS Eliot, Louis MacNeice, WH Auden and Vera Brittain. (Brittain was one of a small but growing number of women to study at Oxford, where they were able to receive degrees from 1920, almost 30 years earlier than at Cambridge.)

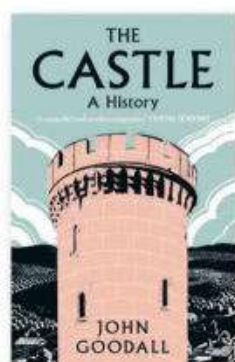
Overall, this book is an absolute delight. Its strength lies in its focus on lesser-known

figures over more obvious candidates; Tolkien, for example, gets a glancing mention but is otherwise absent. Dunn wears her serious scholarship lightly as she traces the interconnected lives of some of the finest minds of a generation. **H**

Ben Cowell, director general of Historic Houses, the UK’s largest collection of historic houses and gardens

CASTLES

Set in stone



The Castle: A History
by John Goodall
Yale, 400 pages, £18.99

No one knows castles better than John Goodall. His earlier book *The English Castle* (2011, also published by Yale) was

a magisterial and monumental survey of its subject, clocking in at 480 pages and weighing more than 3kg. This new volume, by contrast, is a somewhat lighter affair. We are presented with just over 100 chapters, each focused on a particular castle (or,

occasionally, a group of castles) at a significant moment in its history – a royal visit, a siege, a great rebuilding, etc. The chapters are arranged chronologically, advancing from the Norman Conquest to the present day. The majority of the castles are English, with a dozen in Wales, two in Scotland and one in Ireland. A handful are fictional (Blandings, Hogwarts, Disney), and a few of the more famous (Dover, Windsor, the Tower of London) are visited on more than one occasion.

The format of each chapter is the same: we are presented with a short introduction to the story in italics, followed by a lengthy quotation from a contemporary source – a chronicle, a letter, a financial account – which is then analysed and explained by Goodall himself. The book is well-written: expert but always intelligible; conversational but never condescending.

The main caveat is that, despite its title, this is not really a history of “the castle”, more a collection of stories involving castles. In some cases, the building in question serves only as a backdrop to the events being described. Though about two-thirds of the chapters include a black-and-white photo or picture, there are no maps, plans or diagrams, and the unique architectural qualities of particular castles sometimes go undiscussed. As such, this would best be regarded as a companion volume to Goodall’s earlier book – a compilation of colourful stories to be dipped into and savoured. **H**

Marc Morris, author of *Castle: A History of the Buildings that Shaped Medieval Britain* (Cornerstone, 2012)

The background of the page is a large, dark, and dramatic painting. It depicts a ship, possibly a galleon, struggling in a stormy sea. The ship's sails are partially visible, and the hull is dark. In the foreground, a large, dark, and somewhat monstrous shape, likely the whale from the painting 'Jonah and the Whale', is visible. The sky is filled with dark, swirling clouds, and the overall tone is somber and dramatic.

VISIT

The monarchy's masterpieces

Buckingham Palace is home to some truly beautiful and important paintings, including scores of artworks produced by the European Old Masters. Typically, they are displayed in the Picture Gallery, providing a striking backdrop for state visits and a high point of summer tours of the palace. Now some of those masterpieces have left London and moved to the Queens Gallery at the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh, for an exhibition mounted by the Royal Collection Trust.

Works by celebrated artists such as Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Rubens and Gentileschi all feature. Highlights include Rembrandt's luminous portrait of *Agatha Bas*, painted in 1641, and Gentileschi's iconic self-portrait, likely produced when she was visiting England during the reign of Charles I.

Masterpieces from Buckingham Palace

The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh /
25 March–25 September / Booking required / rct.uk

Art on the move

Gaspard Dughet's *Seascape with Jonah and the Whale*, c1653–54. A selection of famous European artworks from Buckingham Palace will be going on display at the Queen's Gallery in the Palace of Holyroodhouse

ENCOUNTERS

DIARY: VISIT / WATCH / LISTEN / TASTE

By Jonathan Wright, Samantha Nott and Rhiannon Davies

92 EXPLORE... The Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford

94 TRAVEL... The Hague, Netherlands

An astonishing
62-plate samurai
helmet, made in 1537,
is a highlight of the
new exhibition at
Buckingham Palace



VISIT

Eastern treasures

Another hotly anticipated exhibition staged by the Royal Collection Trust is opening in London in April, this one devoted to all things Japanese.

The RCT boasts one of the most remarkable collections of Japanese art and design in the west, including several highlights that are now being shown together for the first time. Featuring samurai armour,

exquisite ceramics, embroidered screens, intricate fans and diplomatic gifts, the exhibition will guide visitors through three centuries of artistic, cultural and diplomatic dialogue between the Japanese and British imperial and royal families.

Japan: Courts and Culture

The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, London
/ 8 April–12 March 2023 / Booking required / rct.uk

LISTEN

Memories of war

Forty years ago this April, British forces sailed to the south Atlantic to reclaim islands that had been invaded by Argentina's military junta – a remote archipelago known to that South American nation as the Malvinas, and to Britons as the Falklands. The conflict that ensued is the subject of a BBC podcast aimed primarily at those aged 35 and under – too young to remember the Falklands War, which lasted for 74 days in 1982.

Hosted by broadcaster and former Royal Marine JJ Chalmers and historian Professor Helen Parr, whose uncle died on the final day of the conflict, the podcast features interviews vividly bringing the recent past to life – including with a paratrooper who fought in the bloodiest encounters of the war.



It Happened Here: The Falklands War

BBC Sounds / Available to download and stream in late March

British troops march towards Port Stanley, 1982. Forty years on, a podcast explores the conflict

WATCH

Gang stars

In March 1890, when 26-year-old teetotaler George Eastwood ordered himself a ginger beer at a pub in Birmingham, a gang leader called Thomas Mucklow and his friends mocked his choice of drink. Worse, those men lay in wait for Eastwood when he left the bar and gave him such a beating that he was left fighting for his life. After that assault, newspaper reports of the incident included the first media reference to "Peaky Blinders".

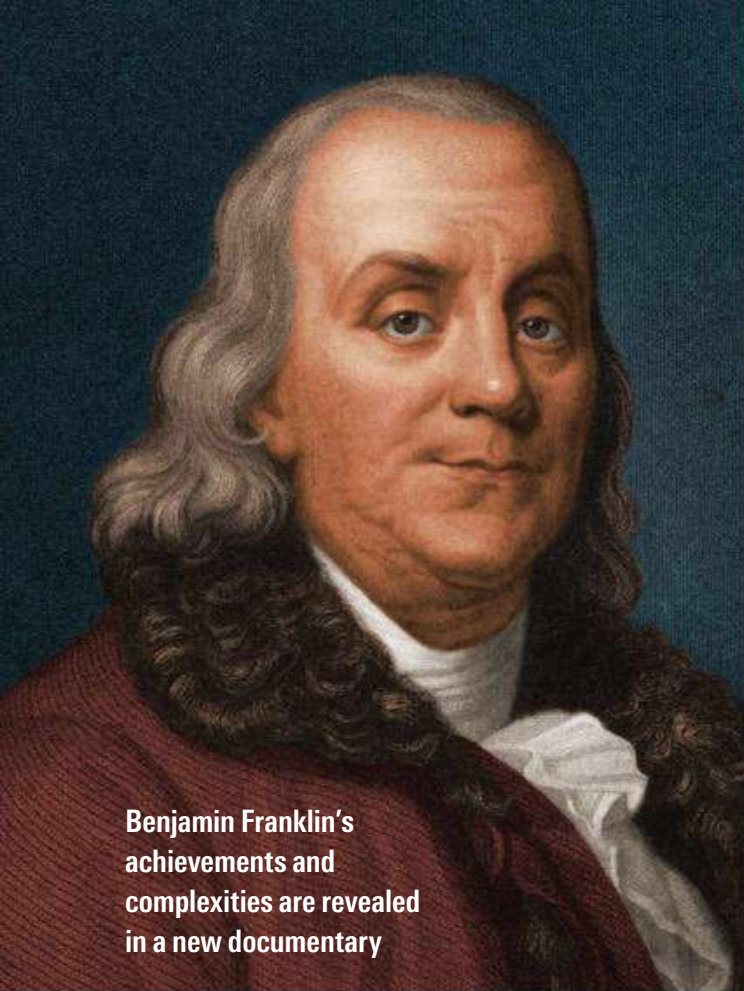
To coincide with the latest series of the BBC drama, *The Real Peaky Blinders* tells the stories of real-life Tommy Shelby. Drawing on the work of Professor Carl Chinn, it traces the history of English criminal gang culture back beyond even Mucklow to the sectarian Murphy riots, which gripped Birmingham in 1867.

The Real Peaky Blinders

BBC Two and iPlayer / March

Some of the real "Peaky Blinders", gang members who wreaked havoc in Birmingham





Benjamin Franklin's achievements and complexities are revealed in a new documentary

WATCH

The polymath as statesman

By any standards, the life of Benjamin Franklin (1706–90) was remarkable. One of the leading intellectuals of the American Enlightenment, his career encompassed scientific endeavour – notably in the study of electricity – plus groundbreaking inventions and publishing.

In the public sphere, he was one of the so-called Committee of Five (the founding fathers of the US who drafted the Declaration of Independence) and the primary founder of what would later become the University of Pennsylvania. Though from a modest background, he became feted by Parisian society during his tenure as the first US ambassador to France.

In short, his was a life of such historical importance that it demands to be profiled – but also one so eventful that this presents a daunting prospect for any filmmaker. Happily, that didn't deter Ken Burns (*The Vietnam War*), whose new two-part documentary seeks to make sense of Franklin.

Contradictions and schisms lie at the heart of the fascinating story. As an example, Franklin became an abolitionist later in life, yet in the middle of the 18th century he had been a slaveowner himself.

Benjamin Franklin

PBS America / Wednesday 6 & Thursday 7 April

HISTORY ON THE AIRWAVES

"It's important to document ordinary lives as well as the changing political and social context"



KAVITA PURI (left) discusses the fifth series of *Three Pounds in My Pocket*, which tells the stories of successive generations of British south Asians

Did you expect to get so close to the present day with this series?

Never! When I started gathering testimonies nearly 10 years ago, I was thinking only about documenting the arrival of the £3 generation, because it hadn't been done extensively before. I wanted to put on record what those early postwar arrivals imagined Britain to be like, what it really was like when they came, and their first steps in their new country. We're now in the fifth series, looking at the years 2002–7.

The programmes now have a huge following, particularly with younger generations of British south Asians who are eager to know their history.

In the new series you discuss the idea that the Indian subcontinent seems closer, thanks to technology. How has this affected British south Asians?

By 2002, a revolution in communication technology was under way, and speaking with family in India, Pakistan or Bangladesh became much easier and cheaper, initially thanks to phone cards. When people first arrived in Britain during the postwar years, such calls happened at most a few times a year – they were just so expensive. For decades, communication was mostly via letters written on blue aerogrammes. That's hard to imagine now.

One of the stories you explore is the Gate Gourmet dispute, which took place in Southall in 2005. Why did you look at that?

In the early noughties there was an economic boom during which many, particularly British Indians thrived – but not all. The Gate Gourmet dispute [involving a company making in-flight airline meals] highlighted the working lives of first generation women, often from the Indian Punjab, and predominantly Sikh. For months the company and the workers' union had been negotiating a change in workers' rights. Then, in August, hundreds

of employees dramatically lost their jobs after agency workers were brought in. Gate Gourmet said they took action after the workers refused to return to their jobs. There were protests, and while some workers were eventually reinstated not all were. It's a piece of history that has been largely overlooked and rarely seen from the women's perspective.

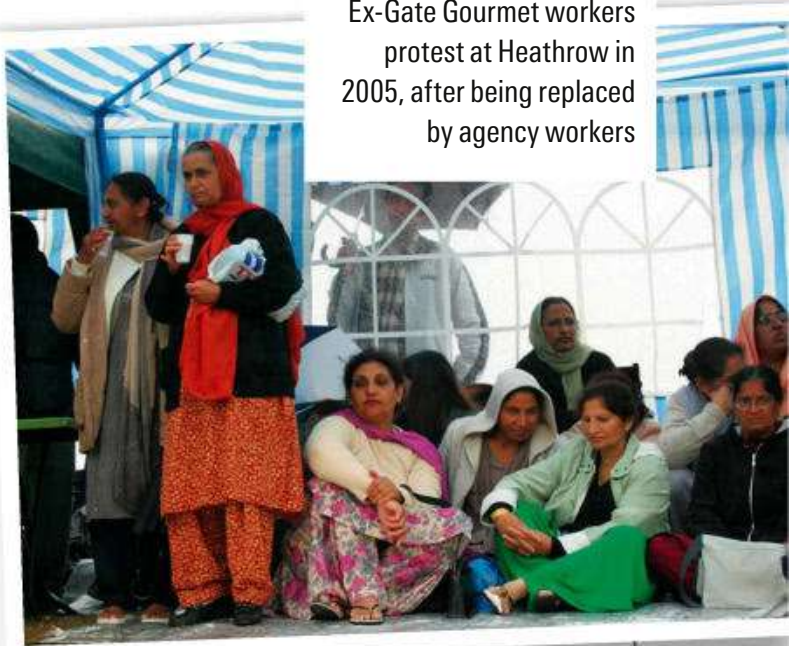
What do the £3 generation make of the lives of their descendants?

For me, it's important that these series not only mark the changing political and social context for British south Asians, but also document ordinary lives – the relationships between the generations, as well as whether they continue to feel a sense of belonging to the Indian subcontinent. In this new series, the second generation are divorcing, having their own children. We hear of old arguments with parents being soothed, and how the second generation – who largely grew up without grandparents – wanted to make sure that their children enjoyed the precious relationship they themselves had lacked. **H**

Three Pounds in My Pocket returns to BBC Radio 4 on Friday 8 April. The first four series are available to stream now on BBC Sounds



Ex-Gate Gourmet workers protest at Heathrow in 2005, after being replaced by agency workers



WEEKLY TV & RADIO

Visit historyextra.com for weekly updates on upcoming television and radio programmes

TASTE

Pastiera napoletana

At Easter, families in Naples celebrate with slices of a sweet tart called *pastiera napoletana*. According to legend, this dessert was first concocted by Partenope, a mermaid who lived in the Gulf of Naples. Customarily, *pastiera napoletana* was made during Holy Week, and took up to three days to prepare. Our quicker recipe uses pre-cooked wheat berries (*grano cotto*) or pearl barley to cut two days of cooking.

Difficulty: 3/10

Time: 2.5 hours (plus chilling time)

INGREDIENTS

Filling

580g *grano cotto* (or pre-cooked pearl barley)
250g granulated sugar
500g fresh ricotta
5 eggs, beaten
Grated zest of 1 lemon
Vanilla pod, scraped of seeds
80g candied peel
800g dried apricot, diced (optional)
Pinch of ground cinnamon
1 tsp orange blossom water
Icing sugar

Pastry

400g flour
Pinch of salt
225g salted butter, chilled and diced
3 medium egg yolks
6 tbsp chilled water
5 tsp caster sugar

METHOD

1. To make the pastry, put the flour,

salt and chilled butter into a food processor. Blitz the ingredients together until they form a pale crumb. Empty into a large bowl, add the caster sugar and mix.

2. Mix the egg yolks with the water. Add 4 tbsp of this yolk mixture to the crumb. With a knife, quickly distribute the liquid through the mixture to create large flakes.

3. Use the flat of the knife to bring the flakes together. Add liquid if necessary, but not too much to avoid making the pastry tough.

4. Pull the pastry together with your hands and shape into a flat disc without overworking it. Wrap in clingfilm and chill in the fridge for 20–30 minutes.

5. For the filling, whip the ricotta and granulated sugar together to get a creamy consistency.

6. Fold the eggs into the mixture.

7. Add the *grano cotto* or pearl barley, lemon zest, vanilla seeds, candied peel, diced apricots, cinnamon and orange blossom water. Mix well.

8. Pre-heat the oven to 170°C.

9. When the pastry has chilled, roll it out to 0.5cm thickness. Use it to line a greased and floured 24–26cm cake tin. Trim and keep excess dough.

10. Fill the pastry with the ricotta mixture. Roll out remaining dough, cut into 6 thick strips and create a lattice on top of the cake.

11. Bake for 90 minutes. Cool and refrigerate for 12 hours before serving, dusted with icing sugar.

Recipe: The Tiny Italian (thetinyitalian.com; Instagram @thetinyitalian)



This traditional tart makes a perfect Easter breakfast or afternoon snack



Artist Omar Victor Diop poses as 18th-century Haitian politician Jean-Baptiste Belley in a 2014 image. A new display delves into historical men's fashion

VISIT

Strike a pose

From the frock coats favoured in the Victorian era to flashy smoking jackets and 20th-century mass-produced suits, changing trends and tastes have shaped what men have worn for centuries.

The fascinating world of men's fashion is explored in a new exhibition at the V&A. With examples ranging from the artfully draped male sculptures of antiquity right up to modern-day garments such as Calvin Klein boxers and Billy Porter's stunning red-carpet outfits, the displays explore how menswear has changed over time. Look out for a section on colour, which explores how pink was traditionally a masculine hue favoured by aristocratic sitters in oil paintings, and how associations with that shade have altered.

Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear

V&A, London / Opens 19 March / Booking required / vam.ac.uk

LISTEN

Talking at cross-purposes

In 1927, Hilda Matheson became the first director of talks at the BBC. Over the next few years, Matheson – who had previously worked as a political secretary to the MP Nancy Astor – became a pioneer in what we now call speech radio, establishing Auntie's news operations along the way. It was Matheson, for instance, who launched *The Week in Westminster*, which was initially created to explain the workings of parliament to newly enfranchised women.

Matheson's career with the BBC was influential but relatively brief – principally because, though she had been headhunted by its first director-general, John Reith, her working relationship with him was often difficult. Crucially, the duo had very different attitudes towards both politics and the modern novel. One



Hilda Matheson (left, in 1938) was a pioneer of BBC speech radio

result was that when Matheson commissioned a talk by the left-leaning writer and politician Harold Nicolson, to cover *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Ulysses*, a censorship row ensued.

Part of the programming to celebrate the BBC's centenary, *The Battle of Savoy Hill* dramatises Matheson's working relationship with Reith over five episodes, a story informed by Matheson's correspondence with her lover (and Harold Nicolson's wife), the novelist Vita Sackville-West.

The Battle of Savoy Hill

BBC Radio 4 / Monday 28 March

WATCH

Romp and circumstance

Lord Anthony Bridgerton (Jonathan Bailey) is mildly pompous, exacting and critical. He's also intent on finding a suitable bride. Enter the Sharma sisters, Kate (Simone Ashley) and Edwina (Charithra Chandran), lately arrived in London from India.

This is the fraught love triangle at the centre of the new series of *Bridgerton*, the marriage market, Regency-era romantic drama from Netflix. To say it's keenly anticipated is an understatement. The first season attracted a global audience of 82 million households – far more than would typically watch a period piece.

For those who have yet to succumb to *Bridgerton's* charms, its success is arguably in great part down to the fact that it's hardly your standard costume drama. Produced by Shonda Rhimes (creator of *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal*) and based on Julia Quinn's bestselling novels, it's unapologetically escapist. Glamorous in its high-society setting, it tweaks history to show the era as racially integrated and, despite its uptight English characters, frequently steamy.

Two further seasons of *Bridgerton* have been commissioned, and we can also expect a spin-off that will centre on the rise – and love life – of a young Queen Charlotte. **H**

Bridgerton

Netflix / Season 2 streaming from Friday 25 March

Sisters Kate (played by Simone Ashley, left) and Edwina Sharma (Charithra Chandran, right) vie for Anthony's affections in *Bridgerton's* second series



Stony splendour

Designed by Christopher Wren, the Sheldonian Theatre was built to rival the grandeur of ancient Rome. **DAISY DUNN** delves into the eventful history of the imposing building, from falling beams to hirsute busts

In July 1756, the writer Horace Walpole received a letter from his friend George Montagu describing an alarming incident in Oxford. An old acquaintance of theirs by the name of Parson Fletcher had been sitting in an auditorium on Broad Street when a beam fell and hit him on the head. Only his fashionable beaver-skin hat “preserved his brains”.

The Sheldonian Theatre, where Fletcher was struck, is not known for its loose woodwork. Between 1664 – when its foundation stones were laid – and the present day, it has been celebrated as one of the architectural marvels of the university city, with its honey-coloured masonry, elegant cupola and row of sculpted heads guarding its perimeter. The professor of astronomy who designed it was none other than Christopher Wren.

Wren’s brief was to create a new ceremonial hall and home for Congregation, the legislative body of the university, as well as the Oxford University Press. Some years earlier, the chancellor of Oxford (and archbishop of Canterbury) William Laud had grown uneasy about hosting degree ceremonies at the University Church, owing to the coarseness of some of the speeches. Gilbert Sheldon, former warden of All Souls, and Laud’s near-successor as archbishop, agreed to finance the new theatre single-handedly, hence lending it his name.

Wren aspired to the grandeur of ancient Rome, but had to rein in his plans to keep within Sheldon’s budget of £14,500 (roughly

£3.7m today). His design, which utilised local stone for the lower half of the building, and Cotswold stone for the upper, nevertheless pays homage to the D-shaped auditoria of antiquity. Vying with the Roman Pantheon in the span of its unsupported roof, which exceeds 20 metres in diameter, the theatre also features a ceiling painting showing an awning being pulled back as if in readiness for an open-air performance.

Since opening on 9 July 1669, the theatre has hosted a diverse range of people, from Handel, who premiered his ‘Athalia’ there in 1733, to Hillary Clinton, a recent contributor to the prestigious Romanes Lectures. An especially momentous ceremony took place in 1920 when, for the first time in history, female students received their degrees in the theatre.

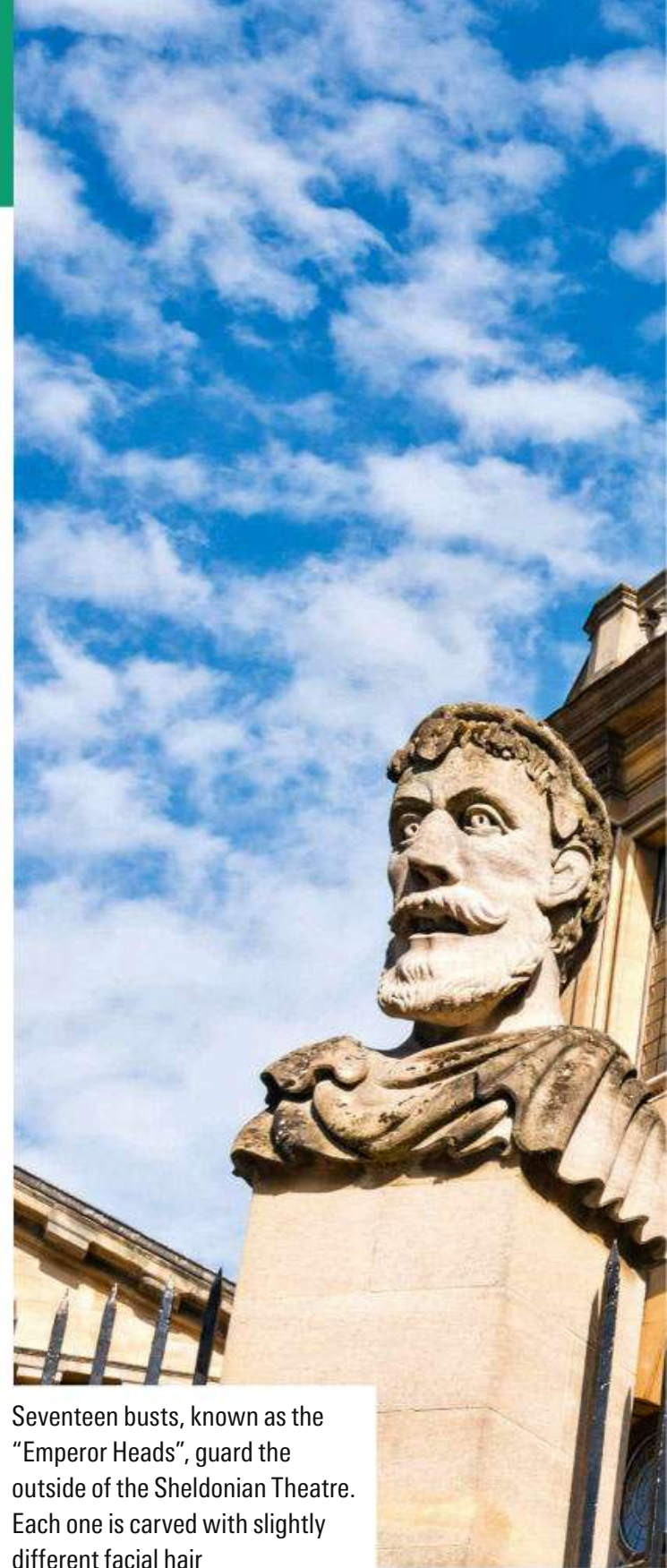
Seven widows’ cottages were demolished when the Sheldonian was constructed, so a sum of £7 has been payable twice a year to a charitable foundation. As Dr Andrew Fairweather-Tall, chair of the Sheldonian curators, explains: “In the early 2000s, the payments accidentally stopped. The trustees wrote to the vice-chancellor explaining that the land could be reclaimed if they weren’t reinstated, so the tradition hurriedly resumed.”

Today the Sheldonian is open to students, including for their matriculation and graduation ceremonies. Members of the public can also visit, getting the chance to enjoy some of the best views of Oxford’s dreaming spires from the theatre’s cupola. As the building also still serves as the meeting place of Congregation (the press moved out in 1713), it occasionally closes at short notice, but visitors can always admire the carved heads outside.

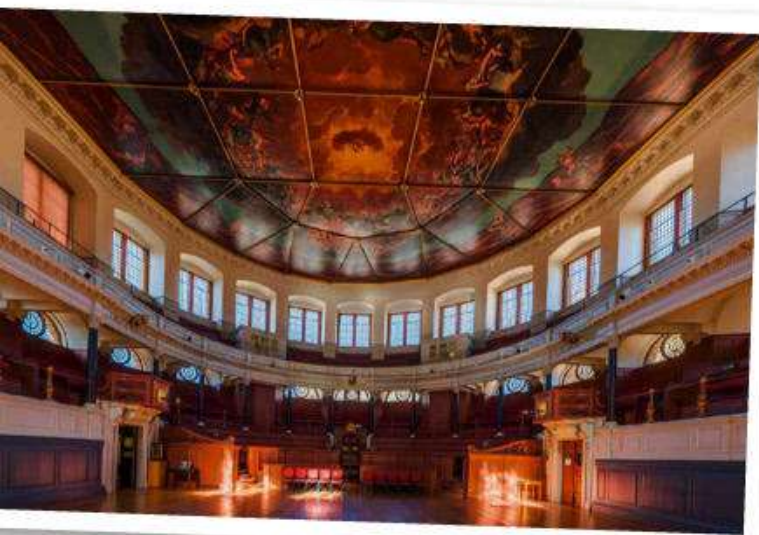
The current busts that ring the Sheldonian are the third generation to guard the building. Perhaps their most important function is to prompt visitors to look up and appreciate the magnificence of Wren’s masterpiece. **H**

Daisy Dunn’s new book, *Not Far From Brideshead: Oxford Between the Wars*, is published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson on 31 March

VISIT For more information on the Sheldonian Theatre, go to sheldonian.ox.ac.uk/visit



Seventeen busts, known as the “Emperor Heads”, guard the outside of the Sheldonian Theatre. Each one is carved with slightly different facial hair



The Sheldonian Theatre’s interior is magnificent, mirroring the D shape of ancient auditoria



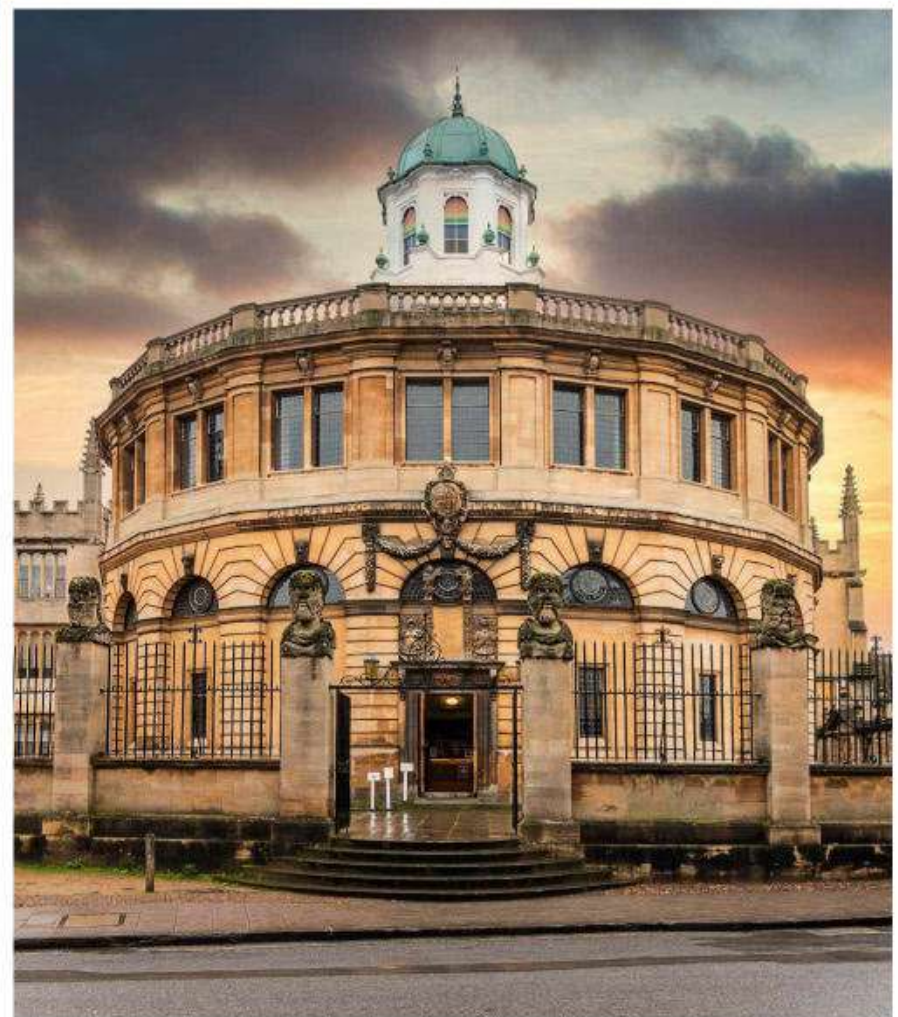
ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES/OXFORD UNIVERSITY



Part of the fresco that adorns the theatre's ceiling, created by the artist Robert Streater. The painting symbolises the triumph of truth over envy and ignorance



Christopher Wren (shown here in 1711) designed the Sheldonian, setting out to create a building befitting of ancient Rome



The Sheldonian Theatre is home to Congregation, the legislative body of the University of Oxford, and all students receive their degrees in its ceremonial hall. The grand building is also open to members of the public

// The Hague
bloomed during the
Dutch golden age
of the late 16th and
17th centuries //



Parliaments, paintings and power

The Hague (*Den Haag* in Dutch) is the Netherlands' administrative and royal capital. If that fact conjures up an image of a stately and staid city, then a visit will prove a surprise.

The political hub of the Netherlands since the 13th century, The Hague bloomed during the Dutch golden age of the late 16th and 17th centuries. However, it diminished during the 19th century – when the centre of power of the United Netherlands shifted elsewhere – and was badly damaged in the Second World War.

The city has always enjoyed a high status internationally, with its reputation as a key location for law and justice. Significant international treaties on the laws of conflict and war crimes have been signed there, and it became the base of the International Court of Justice when it began work in 1946.

Compact, green and easy to explore by foot, tram or even by boat, The Hague offers the historic surroundings of the Binnenhof, the world's oldest parliament building still in use, and top-drawer art at the Old Masters-filled Mauritshuis museum. The eye-popping display dedicated to the graphic artist MC Escher in Het Paleis Museum is also well worth a visit.

Canalside bars and a city-centre dining scene taking in influences from around the world – Indonesian and other Asian cuisines are especially strongly represented – are perfect for before or after a show, or just as a wonderful way to pass a summer's evening. And if the sun is shining then aim for the seaside districts of Scheveningen, a tram ride from the centre of the city.

The Hague is easy to get to by rail from the UK, via a short train ride from Rotterdam or Amsterdam, both served by the Eurostar service from London. Alternatively, from the Harwich to Hoek van Holland ferry docks, it takes around an hour by metro and onward train to reach the city. **H**

IF YOU LIKE THIS...

- **Maastricht** is another Dutch delight well off the tourist trail, packed with cultural attractions.
- **Hamburg, Germany** combines maritime heritage with varied architecture and art.

By **Tom Hall**, travel writer and author of *Lonely Planet's Best Ever Travel Tips*

Beating heart

The Binnenhof, which houses the world's oldest parliament building still in use, is among The Hague's must-see attractions

ALAMY

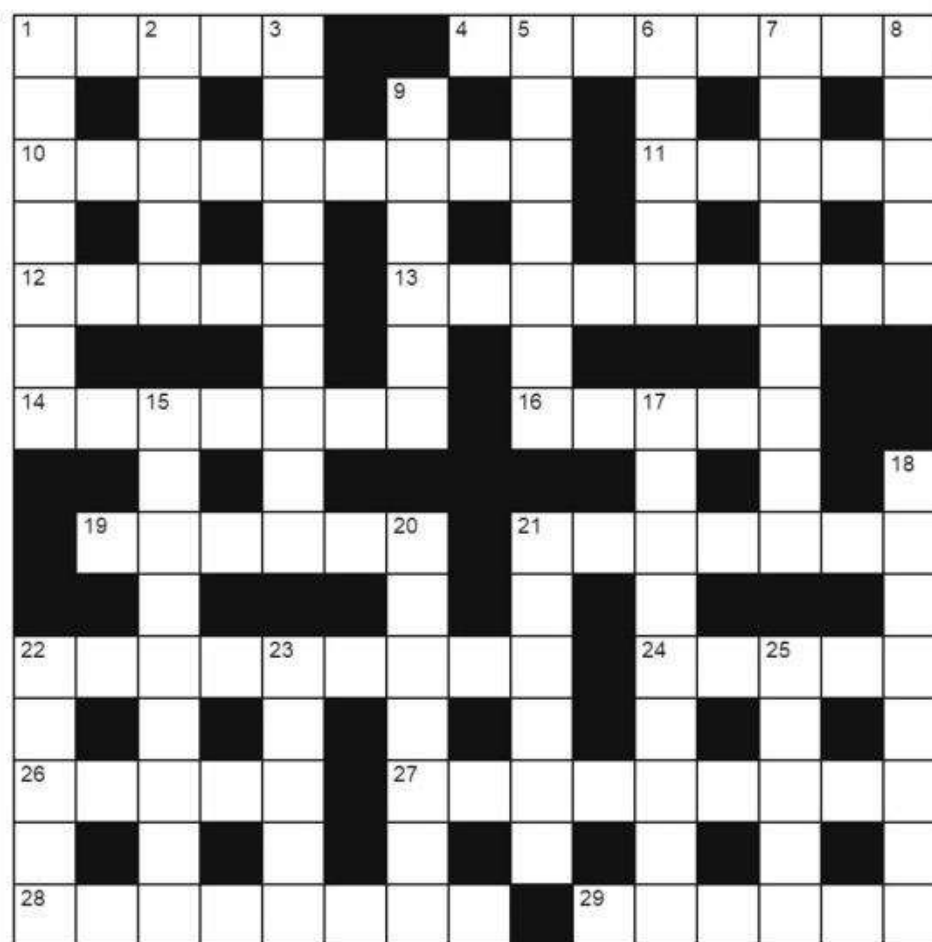
PRIZE CROSSWORD

Across

- 1** More than 60 ____ have been found in the Valley of the Kings, including number KV62 – that of Tutankhamun (5)
- 4** Eg the one imposed by Abraham Lincoln on Southern ports during the American Civil War (8)
- 10** Romanian fascist party with strict Christian Orthodox ideals, operating from 1927 to 1941 (4,5)
- 11** Abbreviated form of the regional defence organisation set up by a treaty signed in Manila in 1954, lasting to 1977 (5)
- 12** Epic poem set during the Trojan War (5)
- 13** ____ David, mid-20th-century food writer, a major influence on the revitalisation of home cookery in Britain (9)
- 14** Device used by the Romans to secure their ships to enemy vessels in order to board them for hand-to-hand fighting (7)
- 16** ____ Rommel, German tank commander in the Second World War (5)
- 19** Another name for the Italian-American Mafia that came to prominence in the US in the 1920s (3,3)
- 21** Introduced around 1900, this box camera by Eastman Kodak brought photography to the masses (7)
- 22** Top policy-making committee introduced in Russia after the revolution and then in other communist countries (9)
- 24** Nazi officer tried by a Polish court in 1947 and hanged at Auschwitz, where he had been camp commandant (5)
- 26** Modernising Russian tsar (taking the title emperor in 1721), ruling jointly until 1696 and alone until 1725, bynamed Great (5)
- 27** Great ancient city later named Constantinople and now Istanbul (9)
- 28** Notorious penal institution in New York State, opened in 1826 (4,4)
- 29** Prehistoric standing stone, of which many remains can be seen at Carnac in Brittany (6)

Down

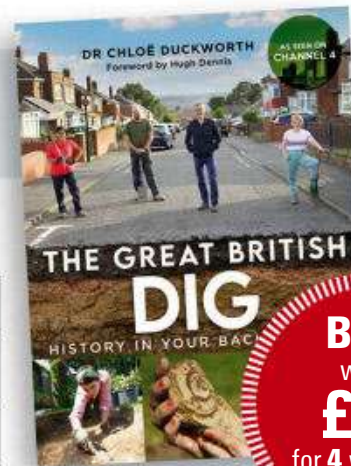
- 1** ____ Rebellion, a 14-year period of major political and religious upheaval in China starting in 1850 (7)
- 2** Migrant settlers in New Zealand who had developed a rich, distinctive culture by the time of the first European contact in 1642 (5)
- 3** Roman fort at the eastern end of Hadrian's Wall, guarding the Tyne estuary (9)
- 5** Member of a band of English workers who



- violently protested the introduction of textile-making machines in the 19th century (7)
- 6** Said to be the first of the assassins to stab Julius Caesar (5)
- 7** Mythological king of Mycenae who commanded the Greek forces in the Trojan War (9)
- 8** First name of the politician ejected from the shadow cabinet following his so-called "Rivers of Blood" speech in April 1968 (5)
- 9** See 25 down
- 15** He united England in the 10th century, becoming its king (9)
- 17** Neolithic circle monument in Wiltshire, 2 miles from the more famous stone ring (9)
- 18** Sir Henry ____, inventor of an innovative process for the inexpensive manufacture of steel which he announced in 1856 (8)
- 20** Henry IV of France was the first king of this ruling house, which became one of the most important in Europe (7)
- 21** Metal alloy that when developed gave civilisations using it a technological advantage, marking a new era in history (6)
- 22** He started writing his later-celebrated series of diaries on 1 January 1660 (5)
- 23** People once considered synonymous with the Ottomans – misleadingly ignoring the multinational character of that empire (5)
- 25/9** British nurse, a heroine of the First World War, executed for assisting Allied soldiers escaping from German-occupied Belgium (5,6)

Compiled by **Eddie James**

What is the first name of this influential mid-20th-century food writer? (13 across)



Book worth **£25** for 4 winners

The Great British Dig: History in Your Back Garden

By Chloë Duckworth

Archaeologist Chloë Duckworth delves deeper into the sites showcased on the Channel 4 series *The Great British Dig*, from the palace of an Elizabethan spymaster to a prehistoric village buried below a school playing field. She also shares practical tips for anyone who'd like to see what they can dig up themselves on their own home patch.

HOW TO ENTER

● Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to **BBC History Magazine, April 2022 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester LE94 0AA** or email them to **april2022@historycomps.co.uk** by 5pm on **13 April 2022**. ● Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the June 2022 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at <https://policies.immediate.co.uk/privacy>. ● Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these, please write 'NO INFO' on your entry. ● Branded BBC titles are licensed from or published jointly with BBC Studios (the commercial arm of the BBC). Please tick here ☐ if you'd like to receive regular newsletters, special offers and promotions from BBC Studios by email. Your information will be handled in accordance with the BBC Studios privacy policy: bbcstudios.com/privacy. – bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/code-of-conduct

Solution to our February 2022 crossword

Across 6 Lollard 8 Spandau 9 Kiev 10 Town crier 12 Harvard 13 Fatah 15 Almeida 17 Glamis 20 Tomyris 22 Nubian 25 Raid 26 Kennedy 27 O'Neill

Down 1 Popish plot 2 Slaver 3/24 A Epic of Gilgamesh 4 Antietam 5 Parr 7 Rutland 11 Wade 14 Hispaniola 16 Emmeline 18 Lynching 19 Askew 21 Rwanda 23 Borgia 24 Grey

Four winners of The BBC: A People's History

H Harrison, Somerset; M Taha, London; C Greenwood, Lancashire; R Thwaite, Greater Manchester

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● The crossword competition is open to all residents of the UK (& Channel Islands), aged 18 or over, except Immediate Media Company London Limited employees or contractors, and anyone connected with the competition or their direct family members. By entering, participants agree to be bound by these terms and conditions and that their name and county may be released if they win. Only one entry permitted per person. ● The closing date and time is as shown under How to Enter, above. Entries received after that will not be considered. Entries cannot be returned. Entrants must supply full name, address and daytime phone number. Immediate Media Company (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will not publish your personal details or provide them to anyone without permission. Read more about the Immediate Privacy Policy at policies.immediate.co.uk/privacy-policy/. ● The winning entrants will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. The prize and number of winners will be as shown on the Crossword page. There is no cash alternative and the prize will not be transferable. Immediate Media Company London Limited's decision is final and no correspondence relating to the competition will be entered into. The winners will be notified by post within 20 days of the close of the competition. The name and county of residence of the winners will be published in the magazine within two months of the closing date. If the winner is unable to be contacted within one month of the closing date, Immediate Media Company London Limited reserves the right to offer the prize to a runner-up. ● Immediate Media Company London Limited reserves the right to amend these terms and conditions, or to cancel, alter or amend the promotion at any stage, if deemed necessary in its opinion, or if circumstances arise outside of its control. The promotion is subject to the laws of England.





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Peaky Blinders: the history behind the show

As flat-cap-wearing Birmingham gangster Thomas "Tommy" Shelby and his motley crew return to BBC One for the sixth and final season of *Peaky Blinders*, we explore the history of the series so far, and the real inspirations for the characters.

[historyextra.com/peaky-blinders-history](https://www.historyextra.com/peaky-blinders-history)



Opinion: Stonehenge is a pop culture phenomenon

Viewing all of Neolithic Britain through the lens of one monument shuts down an understanding of the diversity of the period, writes Dr Kenny Brophy, who also reveals why he "can't bring himself to love Stonehenge".

[historyextra.com/celebrity-stonehenge](https://www.historyextra.com/celebrity-stonehenge)



Mrs Astor and the Four Hundred

In fashionable east coast society in the years before the turn of the 20th century, there was just one woman who determined who was in – and out. From calculated calling cards to opulent parties, find out how Mrs Astor ruled Gilded Age New York.

[historyextra.com/mrs-astor](https://www.historyextra.com/mrs-astor)



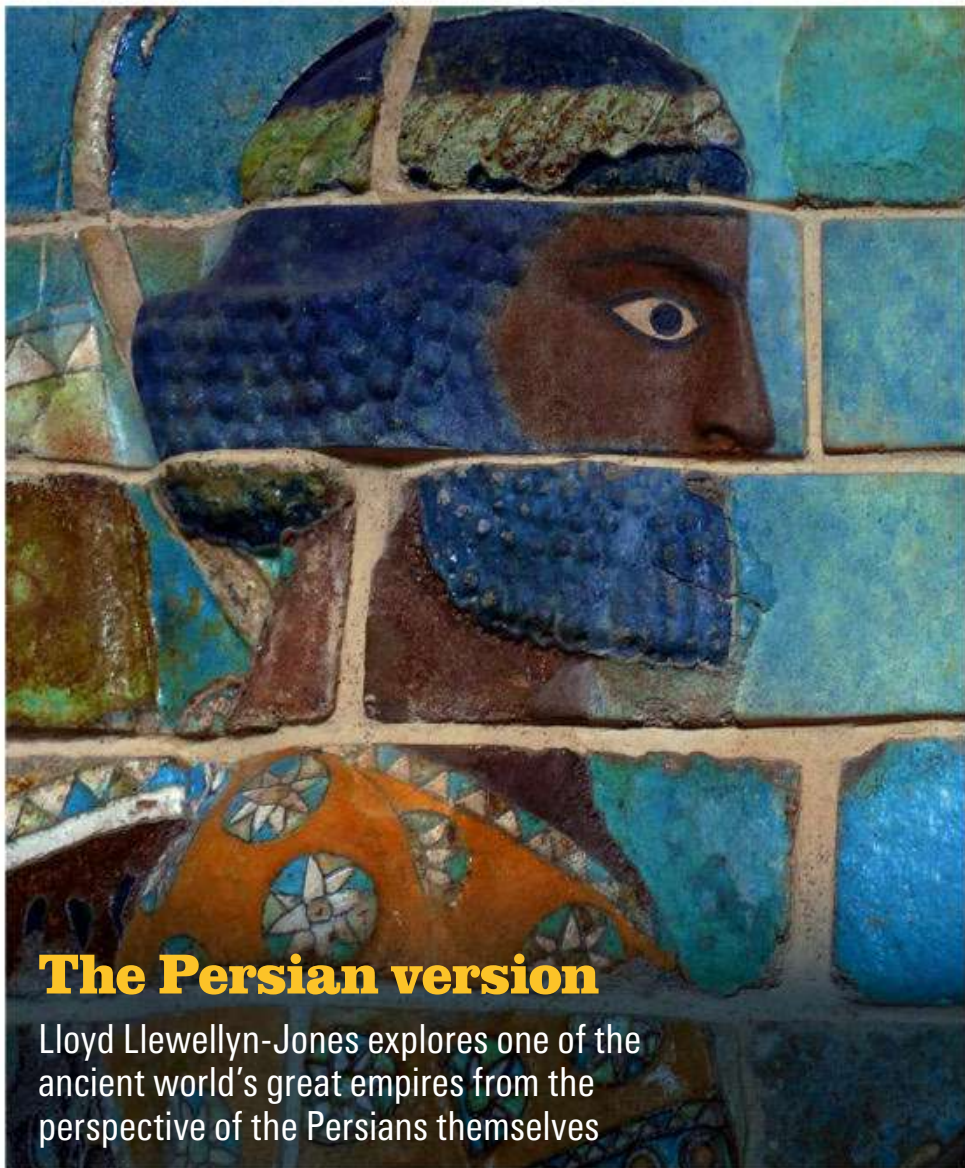
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NEXT MONTH

May issue on sale 14 April 2022



The Persian version

Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones explores one of the ancient world's great empires from the perspective of the Persians themselves

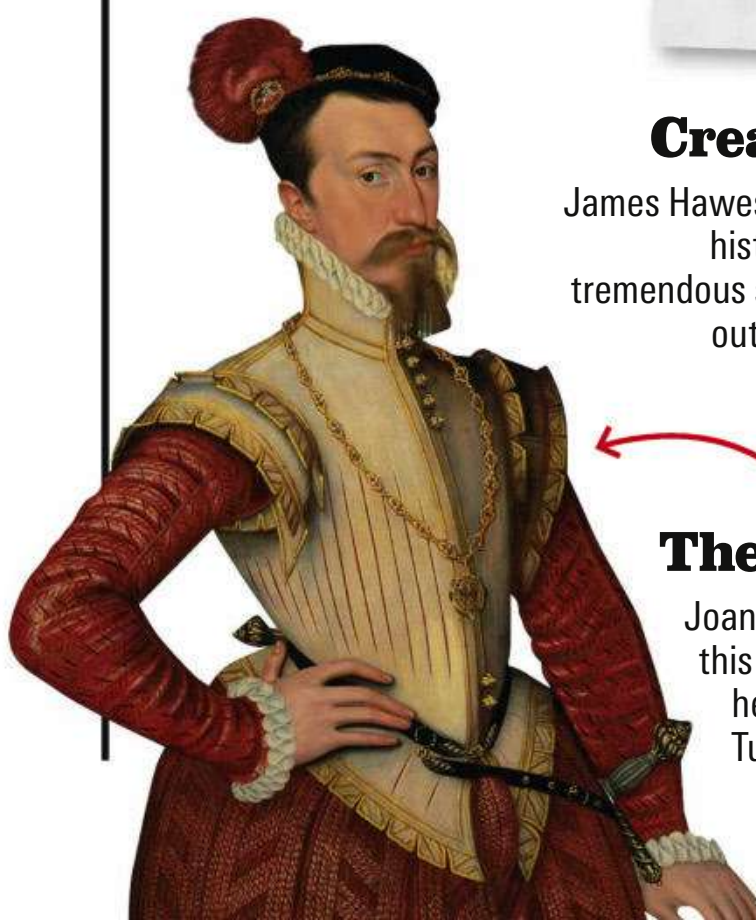
Distant flights

Roy and Lesley Adkins examine humanity's long and complex relationship with birds



Creative genius

James Hawes argues that Britain's history might explain the tremendous success of its cultural outputs across the globe



The Dudleys

Joanne Paul explains how this powerful dynasty helped to shape the Tudor age

MY HISTORY HERO

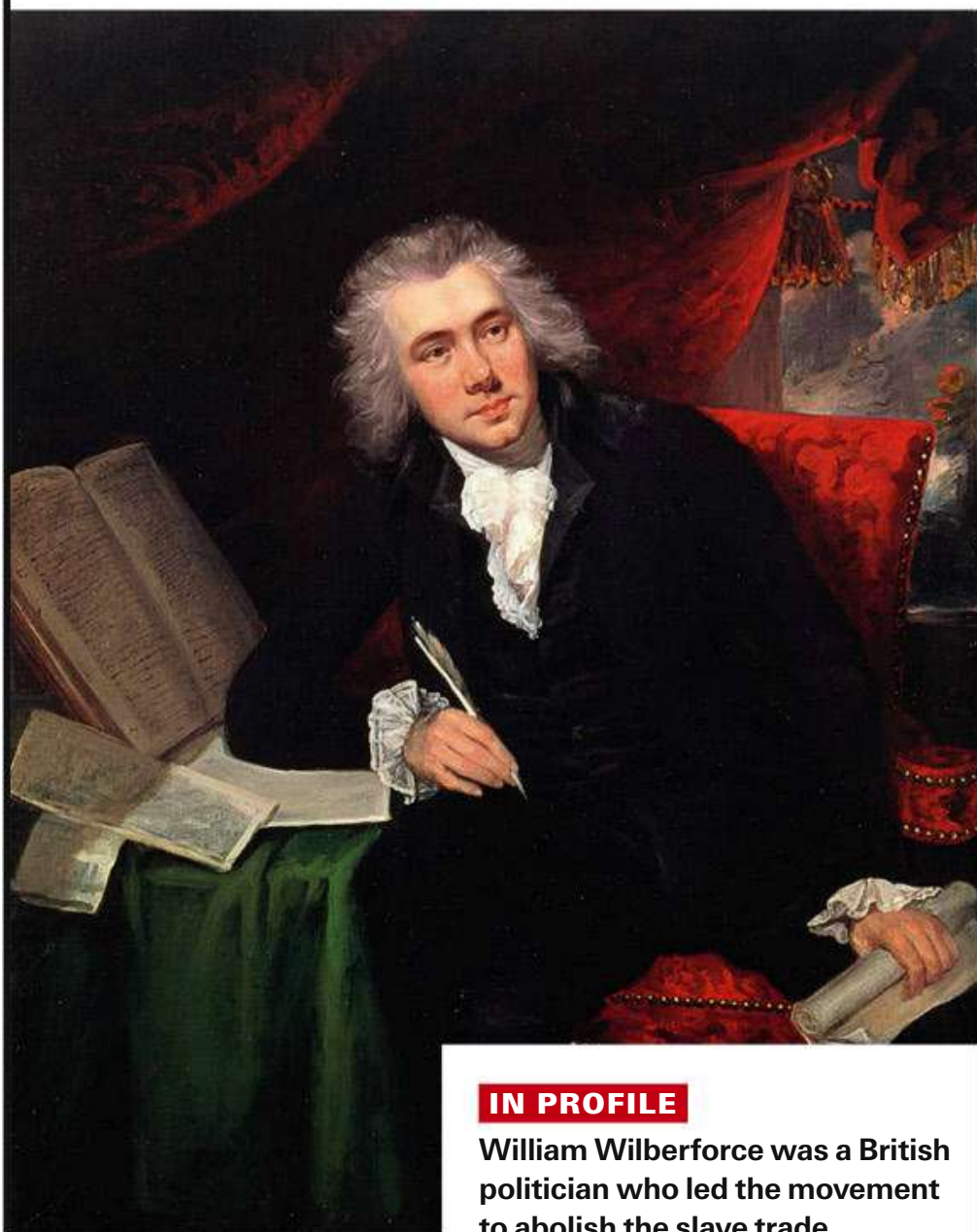
Former Speaker of the House of Commons, *John Bercow*, chooses

William Wilberforce

1759–1833



John Bercow was Speaker of the House of Commons from 2009–19. His podcast, *Absolute Power*, gives a whistle-stop tour of British democracy: absolutepowerpod.com



William Wilberforce depicted in the late 1780s. "One thing I have in common with him is that I like the sound of my own voice," says John Bercow

IN PROFILE

William Wilberforce was a British politician who led the movement to abolish the slave trade, culminating in the passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 – the beginning of the end of slavery in the British empire. An evangelical Christian, and an MP from 1780 to 1825, the Yorkshireman also championed the foundation of the Church Mission Society and the RSPCA. He died in London aged 73 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

// It was thanks, in great part, to his single-mindedness, eloquence and determination that the passage of the Slave Trade Act was secured **//**

When did you first hear about Wilberforce? At school, and later at university. Most people think of reformers as coming from the progressive or liberal wing of politics – but that isn't exclusively true, as Wilberforce shows. I was intrigued to discover that he was a conservatively minded reformer, although he sat in parliament as an independent MP.

What kind of man was he? He was a complex character and was motivated, first and foremost, by his religious conviction. His domestic politics were very much small "c" conservative, and he was in favour of measures to tackle vice. He was also rather short and physically unimpressive – and that's perhaps why I, another physically unimpressive fellow, so admire him!

What made him a hero? Slaves were being transported in the most appalling conditions, and he thought that this was no way for one human being to treat another. He spent 20 years campaigning against this abhorrent trade and, thanks to his single-mindedness, eloquence and determination, he eventually secured the passage of the Slave Trade Act. The fact that he was a backbench member of parliament, and an independent one at that, makes his achievement even more remarkable.

What was Wilberforce's finest hour? The Slave Trade Act of 1807. The act did not abolish slavery overnight but it was an important stepping stone to achieving that end goal. Moreover, the Royal Navy seized more than 1,000 slave ships, and freed tens of thousands of slaves over the following decades. In later years, Wilberforce supported the fight for the total abolition of slavery, which resulted in the Slavery Abolition Act 1833.

Would he believe that his job was now done? Sadly, people smuggling and child trafficking still go on today, so I suspect he'd think that there was still work to do.

Is there anything that you don't particularly admire about Wilberforce? Only the fact that, despite his immense achievement in pushing through the 1807 bill, he showed much less interest in mitigating the plight of the poor in Britain.

Can you see any parallels between his life and your own? Like him, I spent most of my time in parliament as a backbencher. Another thing I have in common with him is that I like the sound of my own voice!

What would you ask him if you could meet him? I'd ask why, as a caring person, he hadn't done more to improve the lot of poor people in his homeland. **H**

John Bercow was talking to York Membership

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A generation ago, a woman named Sylvia made a promise. As a doctor's secretary, she'd watched stroke destroy the lives of so many people. She was determined to make sure we could all live in a world where we're far less likely to lose our lives to stroke.

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Stroke
Association



The British
Museum



The world of Stonehenge

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Nebra Sky Disc, Germany, about 1600 BC.
Photo courtesy of the State Office for
Heritage Management and Archaeology
Saxony-Anhalt, Juraj Lipták.

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